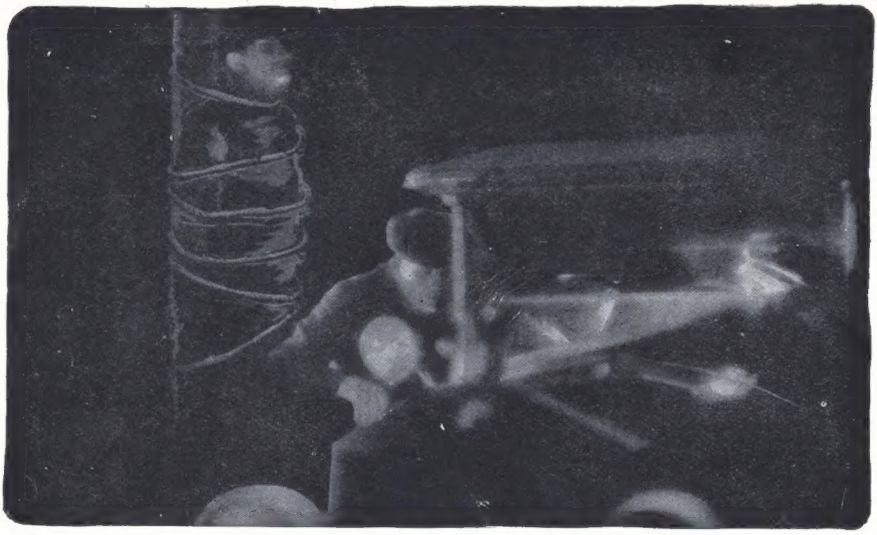
EVERY WEEK JUNE 23 1923

DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE

15 CTS.

THE GIRL IN THE GREEN KIMONO

BY ADELE LUEHRMANN



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NEXT WEEK

When crime stalks in a small town, a good many people are interested in keeping their family secrets hidden.

The Safety Pin

By J. S. Fletcher

A serial in six parts

Commencing in our next issue, is the latest mystery story from the pen of this world-famous writer of detective fiction.

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DETECTIVE STORY
MAGAZINE
EVERY WEEK

Vol. LVIII June 23, 1923 No. 5

Adele Luehrmann, Weaver of Mysteries

Is it some touch of personal genius, or some peculiar quality of the feminine mind that places a number of women in the first rank as writers of detective and mystery stories? Adele Luehrmann—whose latest serial, "The Girl in the Green Kimono," commences in this issue—furnishes an interesting angle on this problem.

A YOUNG girl sat at her sick brother's bedside, seeking to soothe and allay his sufferings. His lips moved feebly, and she moved closer to catch his words.

"Tell me a story, sister," he murmured.

The girl leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes for a few moments, concentrating her mind on an incident that had come within her experience a few days previously. It was a striking situation, and her active imagination added a few dramatic touches that transformed it into a good opening episode for a story.

She opened her eyes and began to speak. As she did so, she found that her story grew, that new complications suggested themselves, that fresh characters sprang into her active mind.

Meanwhile, the sick lad's attention was diverted from his sufferings by the absorbing tale of romance and mystery that fell from his sister's lips.

At last there was a soft knock on the door and the nurse entered. "I think

you'd better leave him now, miss," she said. "He mustn't have too much talking just yet."

The girl rose obediently.

"But you'll finish the story to-morrow, sis," the patient pleaded.

"Yes; I'll finish it to-morrow," the girl agreed.

Before she visited her brother again, she sketched out and elaborated the plot of the yarn she had started to construct from the initial situation and was ready to go ahead with it the following day.

The girl—as you have, of course, guessed—was Adele Luehrmann, and it was under these circumstances that she first discovered in herself a remarkable aptitude for weaving entertaining and absorbing mystery stories.

The impromptu serial she had made up for her brother to alleviate the tedium of the sick room, she later wrote out and submitted to the editor of *People's Magazine.* The story was accepted and published under the title of "The Missing Bullet."

The method of construction followed in that first tale has been her method in all of her stories—to start out with a striking incident and build the entire structure on that foundation, devising new complications and twists of the plot as she goes along.

Miss Luehrmann next wrote "The Curious Case of Marie Dupont," and "The Other Brown," which were published serially and later were brought out in book form. Both stories were well received and served to enhance the author's reputation as a creator of baffling mysteries.

Regular readers of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE will remember this author's first appearance in our pages, when her serial, "The Girl in the Squirrel Cap," was published in six parts, commencing with the issue of March 18, 1919. This was later brought out in book form as "The Triple Mystery."

Since that time Miss Luehrmann has given readers of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE many other stories, among the most noteworthy being "The Green Bag," in three parts, commencing July 1, 1922; "The Woman in 919," in six parts, commencing November 4, 1922; "For the Woman They Loved," a complete novelette in the issue of March 3, 1923; and "That Affair at Gramercy Arms," in three parts, commencing May 5, 1923.

Adele Luehrmann draws her characters from the life with which she is familiar. Mystery, crime, and intrigue stalk in good society, among cultured, well-bred people. The underworld, the more sordid and vicious aspects of crime, she leaves untouched. The scenes of her stories are laid in locations that she knows well. She herself lives in the Gramercy Park section of New York City, that quiet, select residential neighborhood that still retains much of the old-time charm of old Manhattan, so that she was writing very close to home in "That Affair at Gramercy Arms."

"The Girl in the Green Kimono," which opens in this issue, has all the qualities that have made Adele Luehrmann one of the world's foremost writers of mystery and detective stories. Here is the opening installment. See if you don't agree with us!

The Girl in the Green Kimono

& Adele Luehrmann

Author of "Lady Killers," "For the Women They Loved," etc.

CHAPTER I.

IN SEARCH OF A PHONE.

IT was an ideal night for an elopement, Seward thought, as he stood at the entrance of the Hillworth, waiting for Miss Dockery to arrive. The Hillworth was a small, sedate apartment house outside which a person could wait at even so late an hour without attracting inconvenient attention; but the chief reason for its having been selected as a meeting place was its nearness to the Grand Central Station. Miss Dockery objected to lingering in the station itself, for fear of being seen and recognized, a not unreasonable objection under the circumstances.

Seward looked up at the sky. No moon; no stars. In New York one hardly noticed the lack, but in the country it made a world of difference. Out at Somerset now the night must be black. He looked at his watch. It was nearly two o'clock. What could be keeping her? Had she lost her nerve at the last moment? Wouldn't surprise him a bit if she had.

A silly business, this sneaking off in the middle of the night. A girl worth having would walk out of the house in broad daylight and tell her family to go to the devil. Funny, how tastes differed. Some men liked a girl to be timid and helpless. But not for his. He admired courage and independence in a girl as well as in a man.

"I'd like to bet somebody a hundred dollars she won't show up," he said to himself, groping mechanically in a pocket for cigarettes and frowning when he remembered that he had exhausted his supply. He wished he dared leave the spot long enough to get some, but he couldn't take the risk. Not that, in his opinion, there was any real risk of her turning up while he was gone, but she might, and he had promised to be there.

He looked at his watch again, wondering how long he ought to wait before he could feel quite sure she wasn't coming. Of course something might have happened on the way to delay her; he must give her plenty of leeway. Besides, he didn't know exactly how long it took to come from Somerset by motor.

Stepping out to the curb he looked up and down the street. There was not a vehicle of any kind in sight and only two pedestrians, who presently disappeared around a corner, leaving the street entirely empty. The telephone bell in the Hillworth began to ring now, and he returned to his post in the doorway and watched the sleeping porter on the other side of the glass door come reluctantly back to life and duty. Then, while he was watching, a sound in the street made Seward turn quickly, and he saw a closed automobile swing around the nearest corner and come toward him. The next moment he saw that it was slowing for a halt, and then

a woman's head showed for an instant at the window.

In three strides he was at the curb, but the head had been withdrawn, and when he opened the door and leaned into the car its occupant shrank back and hastily pulled down a dark veil over her face.

"Miss Dockery, I'm Ed Seward," he said. "Guess you've heard Jim mention me, haven't you?"

There was no reply. She seemed too frightened to speak.

"Jim's all right," Seward hurried on, anxious to reassure her. "But his mother's been taken suddenly ill—very ill—so Jim couldn't leave her. And he couldn't phone you, of course, so he phoned me and asked me to meet you here and bring you up to the house. I'll just tell the man where to go."

Without waiting for an answer he turned to the chauffeur; noticing that Miss Dockery leaned forward to listen to what he said, as if she were afraid he might be deceiving her, he repeated the address twice very distinctly. Apparently it satisfied her, for when he got into the car she moved a small traveling bag from the seat to her lap to make room for him beside her. But she still did not speak, and her slim, dark-clad figure remained stiffly erect.

"Sorry I've never had the pleasure of meeting you before," he said, as the car got under way. "Jim and I were boys together, and if either of us ever needs a friend he can trust from A to Z, we know where to go. In fact, if Jim had asked anybody but me to come and look after you for him to-night, I'd have been mortally offended. I would honestly."

He checked himself as she made a sudden movement.

"I'd like to stop a minute—to telephone," she said in a nervous whisper that was barely audible. "Please tell the driver—here at the station—that drug store."

Instantly he gave the order. Of course he knew what she wanted; she wanted to call Jim up and make sure about things. And he was glad of it. It was no fun trying to talk to a girl who was scared half out of her wits. The car swerved toward the curb and the lighted windows of the drug store that she had indicated, and he moved to pass her, to open the door and help her out. But she was too quick for him; she was out before the car had stopped.

"I'll be only a minute," she said, and started across the sidewalk to the drug-store door, and both her tone and her manner showed so plainly that she did not want him to go with her that he didn't see that there was anything for him to do but remain where he was. As she crossed the lighted sidewalk, he got a more distinct impression of her than had been possible before. She had on a dark-blue suit and a small hat, which her veil covered, and she was taller than he had thought she was when she was seated. And she walked very gracefully, even though she hurried—as if she were afraid of being pursued. She needn't worry!

He watched her until she had disappeared inside the drug store, then he relaxed comfortably in his seat. The chauffeur, he noted, was doing the same. Just a month, Seward reflected, since her engagement to Andrew Gifford had been announced—hardly that, for he had seen the announcement in a newspaper on the train when he was returning from his summer vacation. At that time "Mr. Andrew Gifford and Miss Maude Dockery" had been mere names to him, and even now he had no idea how this elopement of hers with Jim Allen had come about. He knew only that he disapproved of it. To elope with another man's fiancée, four days before the date set for the wedding! To run away at night!

No, he didn't like it. He didn't like it at all. He was astonished at Jim Allen for doing such an underhanded

thing. It was not like Jim. But then a man in love was not himself. He was insane. For if to go to such lengths to get one particular girl, when there were so many other girls in the world, was not insanity, what was it?

Several minutes passed, and he took out his watch. She would not be long, he thought, unless she had trouble getting her connection, and with Jim's mother ill, their telephone might be in use. The chauffeur, he noticed, was now asleep.

Five minutes—six—seven. She must have been gone fully ten all told; she ought to be back, one would think. Even though she had found the Allen's number busy at first, she couldn't have had to wait long; people did not hold lengthy conversations over the telephone at two in the morning, especially in an apartment where somebody was very ill.

Twelve minutes—thirteen—fourteen. He got out of the car. Could anything have happened to her? Of course not. She was as safe in that lighted store at two a. m. as at two p. m. If he went to look for her he would be sure to meet her coming out of the telephone booth, and she might think he had been spying on her. Better to wait a few minutes more.

Then suddenly he remembered that she had taken her bag with her. He had noticed it at the time, but had thought nothing of it. It was a small bag, and she had had it on her lap; it had not seemed to him unnatural that she had taken it with her. But now, somehow, it did seem unnatural—very unnatural.

He got out and woke the chauffeur. "If Miss Dockery comes back before I do," he said, "tell her I'll be right back. And wait for me, you understand?"

The man nodded. He looked only half awake, but he must be dependable, or Jim Allen wouldn't have trusted him to bring Miss Dockery in from Somerset. He was a quiet-looking chap and owned his car, Jim had said.

Seward went into the drug store. Only a woman was visible, washing the tiled floor. The telephone booths were all empty. He went to the woman and made inquiries.

"Yes, I seen her go through," said the woman, looking up at him with an interested expression.

"Go through?" he repeated. "Didn't she telephone?"

"No, she just came through in a hurry."

"Which way did she go?"

"Out that way." The woman pointed toward a door that led from the store into the railroad station proper.

Seward thanked her and left by the door indicated, from which he emerged into the waiting room of the station. It contained only a few later travelers waiting for trains, and he saw at a glance that Miss Dockery was not there. But he had not expected her to be. He thought he knew what had happened and went straight to the ticket office and asked for a time-table to Somerset.

"Two-twelve," he muttered a moment later and looked at the station clock which stood at two-sixteen. She had made it easily, had known she could, no doubt, when she left him.

She had lost her nerve and gone back home, that was all there was to it. Now he would have to call Jim up and tell him. Well, for his part he thought his friend well out of a bad mess, but he didn't expect that Jim would see it in that way. Still there was nothing for it but to tell him, and accordingly Seward went in search of a telephone.

CHAPTER II.

ON THE ROAD TO SOMERSET.

"JUST what did you say to her, Ed?" The question followed a protracted silence broken only by the low whir of Seward's car, which, together with

himself, he had put at his friend's service. New York lay far behind them now and several sleeping villages as well, and on this stretch of country road they traveled by their own light alone. Save for that the world was black.

"I've told you what I said, Jim," Seward answered. "I said just what you told me to. When she said she wanted to stop and phone, I thought she wanted to call you up. Nothing else entered my head. But even if she had told me she was going back home I couldn't have stopped her, could I?"

Allen made no reply, and there was silence again. Seward knew that his companion blamed him for the miscarriage of his plans, and the injustice irritated him. In Seward's opinion Allen was in luck, and if he had known what was good for him he would have stayed in New York instead of chasing out to Somerset after Miss Dockery. There was no possibility of their arriving at her home ahead of her, unless an accident delayed her train, or the taxi she took from the station at Somerset broke down—both very unlikely contingencies. And, once she was inside the house, how was she to be reached without rousing the rest of the family?

Suddenly Allen spoke again, as if for no other reason than to get away from his despairing thoughts.

"Maude's so sympathetic, so softhearted," he said. "She can't bear to make anybody unhappy. She never wanted to marry Gifford at all. But her aunt wanted her to, and she couldn't say no; that's how she is. Her aunt has taken care of her ever since she was a child, and she couldn't bear to disappoint her. And she wasn't in love with anybody else—then. It wasn't till after we met that she found out she just couldn't go through with it."

"How long have you known each other?" Seward asked.

"About two weeks."

"Two *weeks!*"

Allen gave a sigh. "It doesn't take long to fall in love, Ed," he said. "It's all over with you before you know you're hit."

"Where did you meet her?"

"At the Somerset Club—at a dance. I was there for the week-end. We danced several times, and she invited me to tea the next afternoon—that was Sunday. Gifford wasn't at the dance, and I didn't know she was engaged until somebody happened to mention it to me next morning. But it was too late then."

"So you went to tea that afternoon, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Why did you, if you knew she was engaged?"

Allen was silent for a moment, then: "I hope I'll be around when *you* get it bad," he said crossly.

"Oh, I don't want to be nasty, Jim," Seward answered. "But for the life of me I can't understand how you could bring yourself to play such a low-down trick on another man."

"Low down?" Allen blazed out. "On a doddering old fool who's chasing a girl of twenty—young enough to be his daughter? Gifford's fifty. He's got a daughter nearly as old as Maude."

"What of it? He can still hear and understand plain English when it's addressed to him, can't he? What I mean, Jim, is that—why couldn't you two go straight to him and just tell him you're in love with each other?"

A snort of disgust preceded the response to this suggestion. "You make me sick, Ed. Can't you see that if we tried anything like that we'd raise all sorts of obstacles, but if we're once married they'll have to make the best of it. Besides, Maude won't do the other."

"Tried to get her to, eh?"

"Well, yes, I have."

"I thought so, Jim. I knew it wasn't like you—this sneaking off and——"

"It's not like her, either," Allen put

in. "She hates it as much as I do. She told her aunt she didn't want to marry Gifford and did want to marry me, and what was the result? Mrs. Dockerty went to bed and had the doctor. And she didn't get up till Maude promised to marry Gifford. She said Maude was the only thing she had to live for, and if she disappointed her as her husband had—he'd lost a lot of her money playing the market—she said she'd die. She worked on Maude's feelings, and Maude wrote me she couldn't ever see me again."

"And the next day you decided to elope?"

"No, it wasn't till yesterday that she would agree to anything like that. It was Gifford himself who brought things to a crisis. He'd been away on business for nearly a week, and she had sort of forgotten how she hated him—hated his pawing her, I mean. Lord, when I think of that I——"

"Don't think of it, old man," said Seward. "She isn't going to marry him. What you——"

"She will, if I don't reach her to-night."

"What's the rush? The wedding isn't until Thursday."

"I know, but there'll be detectives there to-morrow to keep an eye on the wedding presents, and she couldn't leave the house without being seen. She'll marry him, if I don't stop it. Lord, I'd like to murder him!"

"Hold up, Jim—you're talking wild."

"I mean it!" Allen's voice rose excitedly. "When I think of his touching her—married to her—I want to choke the life out of him! She shook all over when she told me about his kissing her. She said she nearly fainted. What does a man his age want to marry a girl of her age for? Why doesn't he pick a woman of his own age?"

"I don't know. Ask me again when I'm fifty," said Seward. "Don't talk so wild, Jim. Pull yourself together."

"It's easy for you to talk. How would you feel in my place? Same as I do."

"Maybe; but I'd try to control myself."

"You think you would."

Seward dropped the subject. "What are you planning to do when we get there?" he asked.

The question went unanswered. Allen was still deep in the rut of his thoughts. "He came down yesterday for the week-end. He's there now," he continued. "He brought her a string of emeralds—worth twenty thousand dollars, he told her. That made her realize, she said, that she was just selling herself, and when we met at the country club she agreed to go away with me to-night. If only I'd met her myself! If only I'd gone out for her myself! I wanted to, but she thought it would be safer for somebody else to go, in case I should be seen and recognized by somebody. So I let her have her way and sent Curry. But if I'd gone myself I wouldn't have known my mother was ill, and since she's better again now, it wouldn't have mattered."

"Quit worrying, Jim. What's the good of it?" said Seward and asked again: "What are we going to do when we get there?"

"My Lord, I don't know!" Allen answered in a tone of desperation. "I've got to reach her somehow! I've got to stop her marrying *him!*"

Seward was not surprised to learn that his friend had no plans, but he was none the less troubled by the fact. Familiar as he was with Allen's impulsive temperament, he had never in all the years of their intimate friendship seen him in so distraught and desperate a state of mind. He ought to pull himself together, or he would spoil everything. He was certainly in no condition to make a sensible decision about anything.

For a long time both were silent. They had had the road to themselves

for many miles. The hour was still too early for the loads of garden truck to have started cityward and too late for other traffic. It was the time of night called dead, a very brief time in the outskirts of a great city, a mere lull.

"Oh, this is Somerset," Allen said at last, and then a minute later: "Turn here."

The road into which they turned was better lighted than the other, and on both sides of it fine dwellings emerged vaguely from the shadows for an instant, then were lost to sight again as the car shot by. Somerset was the home of people of wealth and fashion, and the unmistakable aroma of prosperity seemed to rise from it out of the darkness. They passed through the village, then came again to a wide tree-bordered drive from which deep lawns stretched back to more fine dwellings.

"Turn left at this corner; we'll go around to the back," Allen directed, and Seward inferred that the house they were passing was that of the Dockerys. It was in total darkness, without even the front-hall light that he had noticed in most of the neighboring places. By the flash of light from the car, as they passed, he saw it to be a square-built, sizable house standing about twenty feet from its front hedge. That was all he could make out about it.

Passing the adjoining property they reached the corner, ran down a dark side road, turned again into a dark, narrow road that ran behind the line of houses they had previously passed, and presently at a word from Allen, Seward stopped the car and put out his lights. He turned expectantly.

"What now, Jim?" he asked anxiously when his friend got out.

"Sh! Don't talk."

"What are you going to do?" Seward questioned, lowering his tone, as he, too, stepped out of the car.

"Sh! I don't know yet—look around first."

"Look around! You can't see your hand before your face."

"I have a flash."

"This is a fool thing we're doing, Jim."

"We? You're not going with me."

"Yes, I am. If I don't, you'll do something foolish. You're all wrought up and excited, and you'll——"

A grip on his arm checked Seward, then Allen whispered tensely: "Stop talking, will you? Stay here with the car. I know the place, and you don't. I know what I'm going to do."

"What?"

"That's all right. I know."

"What, Jim? You're not going into the house?"

"Of course not."

"What are you going to do then?"

"Flash a light at her window. She can't be asleep. She'll see it, and she'll come to the window, and then when she sees it's me she'll come down. I don't need you. And you don't know the place."

"All right," assented Seward. "But don't try to break into the house, whatever you do."

"Think I'm crazy?"

"You've been acting like it. Just keep your head. If she doesn't see your light come on back. To-morrow's another day, you know."

CHAPTER III.

NO EXPLANATIONS.

TO Seward's parting admonition Allen returned no response. Seward heard his receding footsteps on the concrete walk, then on the grass that bordered it, then they became inaudible.

The darkness was absolute. Though Seward could feel the hedge that ran along the walk and could hear the friction of the leaves, as they moved at his touch, he could see nothing. It was like being blind, he thought, and he shuddered. He had always had a hor-

ror of blindness, and he recalled now how during his summers in the country when he was a child he had kept a box of matches at hand to strike a light if he woke up in the dark, to convince himself that he had not suddenly gone blind. Moved now by the same instinctive need, he groped about in the car for an electric torch and put it in his pocket.

Then, because passive waiting was irksome to him, he began to follow the hedge cautiously toward the Dockery grounds. It would be a good idea anyhow, he thought, to prowl about a little and keep watch, if he could, on Jim, Suppose the scheme of signaling to Miss Dockery with his flash failed, what would Jim do? Would he be sensible and return to the car and give up trying to reach Miss Dockery for the present? Hardly, in the reckless mood he was in. No telling what foolish thing he might do.

Feeling his way along the hedge, Seward advanced cautiously and, before he expected it, came to a gate. It was unlatched, he found, and, taking for granted that it was the gate Allen had lately passed through, he opened it noiselessly and went in. He was tempted now to use light, just a flash, to give him his bearings, but he was afraid that his friend might see the light and, not understanding it, be misled by it. Perhaps if he waited, he thought, he would catch a flash from Allen's torch.

But he did not, and after lingering for several minutes at the gate he started walking from it at right angles, or as nearly so as he could in the darkness, walking with his hands out, slowly and warily. He wasn't going to run into anything and make a noise and spoil things for Jim. That wasn't what he was there for. He did not approve of the enterprise he was engaged in, but he was in it, and he was going to see it through.

Suddenly he came against another hedge—or the same one, perhaps. But no; it was not the same one. This was lower and thinner than the hedge he had followed along the sidewalk. Must be one between two houses. If so, he was on the wrong side of it. That gate he had come in by was probably not the Dockerys' gate at all, but that of their next-door neighbor. An annoying mistake. What was he to do about it? Go back to the street and look for another gate? He hated going back. Perhaps he could find an opening in this hedge somewhere that he could slip through. Hedges always had holes in them.

He went on, feeling at every foot for a break in the shrubbery he was following, but finding none. At last he stopped, facing right where he knew the Dockery house must be, though he could not see it—could see nothing, not even the outline of his hand on the hedge. He listened, but could hear nothing. There was not even wind enough to rustle the leaves of the hedge. The air was still and warm. It would probably rain before morning.

He waited again; how long he could not tell. Allen, he decided, must be around on the other side of the house —that is, if he were really signaling, or trying to signal, to Miss Dockery with his flash. Her room was probably on that side. If he didn't get an answer from her he might go back to the car. Perhaps it would be better to go back and wait for him there.

Seward turned to retrace his steps along the hedge to the street, but at that moment he heard something—somebody moving—off toward the Dockery house —moving over grass. It was the rustling of the grass that he heard.

"Maude!" a voice suddenly called out not far from him with startling loudness.

It was Allen's voice, and it was followed by the sound of steps. Then there was a flash of light, and by it Seward saw at one glance a side porch,

with Allen standing on the ground near it and on the porch, for an instant, a woman's figure, before it disappeared through a door. Then the light went out; there were louder steps, Allen's of course, as he followed the girl across the porch, a door knob turned, then silence again.

Well, it was all right now. The girl was Miss Dockery. Seward had recognized her tall, slim, dark-clad figure and her square-cut traveling bag. How strange that she shouldn't have got there sooner. And how had she come? He hadn't seen or heard a car for some time. She must have left the one she had come from the station in down the road somewhere and walked the rest of the way. A very brave thing for a girl like her to do. Somehow he wouldn't have expected it of her.

He waited for a few minutes, but hearing nothing more, decided to go back to the car, to be there when Allen and Miss Dockery arrived. Jim would be in a hurry to get back to New York, for it would be daylight before they got there. But they could carry out their plans just the same, even if they wouldn't have as big a margin of time as they had counted on.

The return to the car proved a simple matter for Seward. One hedge led to the other, and the gate was then very close at hand. And from the gate he had no difficulty in locating the spot where he had left his car. Reaching the car he found, as he expected, that he was the first arrival, and he got in, then strained his ears for footsteps or voices. He heard nothing. The silence was as intense as before.

Was Jim having trouble in persuading her to go back with him? Had she had enough of eloping? Had her night's experiences shaken her nerve? Wouldn't be strange if they had, though she had only herself to blame for what had happened. If she had had sense enough to call Jim up from the station she would have known that everything was all right. But she had changed her mind, that was probably the truth of the matter. She hadn't run away because she was afraid. A girl who would walk around the country alone at that hour of the night wasn't afraid of anything.

Seward was conscious of a greatly increased respect for Miss Maude Dockery. He decided then and there that she had more character than he had given her credit for. She would probably not marry Jim at all, or do it properly and aboveboard. No doubt Jim was trying to get her to go through with the elopement because he was afraid he wouldn't get her at all otherwise. It would be interesting to see whether she would do it now or not. All he, Seward, asked, was that she would not take the rest of the night to make up her mind. He was getting darned sleepy. And he had a day's work ahead of him—not a honeymoon.

The minutes dragged by, and he was afraid he was going to fall asleep. Now that his anxiety about his friend was over he felt relaxed and tired. He wondered what time it was, but thought it better not to use his flash to see. If Allen's plans should miscarry further, he didn't want it to be his fault. He was in bad enough with Jim as it was. But it seemed as if hours, not minutes, were passing while he sat there waiting. He thought of getting up and moving about to keep sleep away, but when that idea occurred to him sleep was already overpowering him, and the next thing he was conscious of was that he was being shaken roughly by somebody. Then he woke up and found his friend seated at his side.

"Wake up, Ed, for God's sake!" he heard Allen say in an impatient tone. "Let's get out of this."

Seward blinked and sat up. He looked at his companion without speaking. Allen was with him on the front

seat. Miss Dockery was apparently not there.

"Wake up, Ed, for God's sake, and let's get back to town," said Allen harshly. "Go straight ahead. I'll tell you when to turn."

It seemed the part of tact not to say anything, so Seward put on his lights and started the car. From his friend's tone and manner he deduced that the elopement was off—for the night at any rate. He didn't wonder at Allen's impatience and bad temper. The events of the night had been very hard on him, poor old chap. Though he would no doubt live to be glad that things had turned out as they had. Running off with another man's fiancée was nothing to be proud of when you cooled off and thought it over. And if Miss Dockery wouldn't marry him openly, it was much better that she didn't marry him at all.

Allen gave the word to turn presently, and they were soon back on the high-road. Seward still said nothing. He wasn't going to ask questions. Allen could tell him what had happened if he wanted to; he wasn't going to ask and be told that he was to blame for everything.

"Step on her, Ed," said Allen. "What's the idea of loafing when we've got the whole road?"

They were not loafing, but Seward did not bother to point out the fact. He went faster and said nothing. He knew Allen would tell him what he wanted to know if he held his tongue and waited. For full ten minutes neither spoke. Only the soft purring of the car broke the silence around them. They seemed to have not only the whole road, but the whole world to themselves.

Suddenly, as expected, Allen did speak, but what he said was quite unexpected.

"She wasn't there."

"What?" Seward looked around in surprise.

"I flashed a light at her windows again and again. If she had been there she would have answered me somehow. But she didn't, and I gave it up. There wasn't anything else I could do. She didn't take a train, as you thought she did. She must have gone to somebody's house—some friend's. I don't know where she went. But she wouldn't have come out to Somerset alone at this time of night. I ought to have known that. It was a darn fool thing, coming out here after her."

Seward was too astonished to reply, and after a slight pause Allen went on.

"You were fast asleep when I got back to the car. Been sleeping all the time, I guess, eh?"

"No, not all the time. I got kind of tired waiting."

There was another pause, longer than before, then Seward asked: "Which side of the house is her room on?"

"The north side. Why?"

"Nothing. I didn't see you signaling.

"No, you couldn't have—from the car."

Silence again. Seward had an impulse to tell what he had seen and heard, but he refrained. Allen, he thought, was keeping the truth from him because he didn't want to admit that he had seen Miss Dockery, and that she had refused to go through with their elopement plans. He was sore and upset, that was plain from his voice and his manner, and he preferred to have it thought that his plans had miscarried through no fault of his own. Jim was a fine chap, but he was vain. He wouldn't admit that the elopement was off because the girl had changed her mind. That was just like him.

Well, if it was any satisfaction to him to think he was getting away with his story, Seward didn't mind. He was quite willing to have it supposed that he had been asleep and knew nothing. He felt sorry for poor old Jim. It was tough luck to fall in love with the wrong

girl. And there couldn't be much doubt that Miss Dockery was the wrong one for him.

There followed a long silence now. Seward saw no reason to try to make conversation; he and Allen were too old friends for that. But he began to notice after a while that his friend kept putting his hand to his head and suddenly, as if he himself were conscious of the fact, Allen explained:

"Got an awful headache. Ran into a tree in the back yard and nearly knocked myself senseless. You know how dark it was out there."

"Yes," said Seward. "Never saw such darkness. And not a breath of air."

Alllen was silent.

"Guess it's going to rain," said Seward.

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE DARK.

WITH a start Mrs. Dockery sat up in bed. Then, as she awakened fully, she became conscious first of the unusual darkness of the room. The light that she always left burning during the night in the bathroom between her room and her husband's was out. Was that what had awakened her?

It couldn't have been that. That wouldn't have awakened her, she felt sure. Then what had? And why was the bathroom light out? She remembered distinctly putting in a new bulb only a day or two ago; it couldn't have burned out so soon. And Harry hadn't turned the light out. He knew she wanted it on all night. He had never turned it out before.

The room was black. She couldn't make out a thing in it, not even the white bed clothing just under her eyes. And she couldn't hear anything. Then what had awakened her? Had she been dreaming? Perhaps; but who had turned out the bathroom light? Harry might have, without thinking. Anyhow she was going to find out. She couldn't go back to sleep without knowing why she had awakened.

She slipped out of bed noiselessly, and in her bare feet she felt her way to her dressing table, where the nearest light was. She located the switch of the light easily and turned it. There was no result. She turned the switch several times to make sure. No light. The lights were all off!

She began to tremble. Burglars—the necklace! She must do something. She must call Harry. She turned to grope her way toward the bathroom, but at that moment she heard a sound that startled her so that she stopped, shaking violently, listening for the sound to be repeated. In a moment it was repeated, and she gave a cry. Somebody was groaning. It was Harry.

"Harry! Harry!" she called. "I'm coming!" She stumbled across the room, knocking into the chairs and other furniture in her haste and fright, making for the bathroom. When she did find a door it was closed, and that terrified her more than ever. During all the years of her married life the door between her room and her husband's had always been left open at night. Then a groan came from beyond the door, and she groped for the knob, trembling so that she could hardly move it when she found it finally.

Now her first step outside her own room told her that she was not in the bathroom, but in the hall; for beneath her she felt a carpet, not tiling. But another groan told her that she was nearer her husband; for that it was her husband she did not doubt.

"Harry! Where are you? Where *are* you, dear?" she called out frantically, and when no response came she dropped to her knees and began feeling about on the floor. Finding nothing she raised a cry for help.

"Maude! Maude! Mr. Gifford! Help! Help!"

No one answered her, and beside herself now with terror of the silence and the darkness she crawled on, feeling for her husband with shaking hands. And at last she touched what she sought, a human body. At the same moment another groan issued from it.

"Maude! Maude! Mr. Gifford! Eileen! Help—somebody! Maude! Maude!"

Still no reply, only another terrifying groan. Frantic, she called again, her voice louder and higher. And still no one answered her. Even the groans of the prostrate body on the floor beside her had stopped.

"Harry! Harry!" she panted. "What's the matter? What happened to you? Speak to me! Harry! Harry——"

She was whimpering now in her fear. Her voice failed her when she tried to call again for help. But her anxiety for her husband braced her suddenly to effort of some kind, to thought. She must get a light. She couldn't do anything without a light.

She got up, and, as she did so, a door behind her opened—her husband's door. A new terror set her trembling again. Who was there—in her husband's room? Who was coming out? She held her breath, afraid to move. Then to her astonishment and relief she heard her husband's voice.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "That you, Laura?"

"Harry!" In her relief she felt weak and leaned against the wall beside her. The sudden realization that it was not Harry at her feet, groaning, almost overcame her. But she pulled herself together.

"Harry, come here." She spoke in a whisper now. "Something's happened. There's somebody on the floor."

"What?" her husband said sharply. "On the floor?"

"Yes, a man. He was groaning. Didn't you hear him?" She felt for her husband, as she started toward him. "The lights are out," she added. "Oh, Harry, it must be Mr. Gifford."

She heard him coming, and in a moment her hand touched his arm. "Oh, Harry," she said again, "I know it's Mr. Gifford. There have been burglars. The necklace has been stolen. I know it."

"Sh! Be quiet. Haven't you got an electric flash anywhere?"

"No. Oh, Harry, it's awful. Do something."

"Be quiet," he said again. "Where is he?"

A groan from the man on the floor answered him, a groan and an attempt at speech, which was unintelligible.

"That's not Gifford!" Dockery said, stopping short.

"Oh, Harry, call somebody—call Lawson," she begged. "He'll know where there's a flash. Or Katherine will. Call them.'

But Dockery had found the prostrate figure and was kneeling beside it, paying no heed to his wife's words.

"This isn't Gifford," he said again.

"Who is it?" Her voice was startled.

"I don't know. But he has no mustache. It isn't Gifford."

"We must get a light, Harry. I can't stand this darkness. I'll go mad if we don't get a light."

"Be still, Laura, for God's sake!" Dockery's tone was savage.

A groan from the man on the floor rose to their ears dismally and as if in appeal. They both listened, waiting. They could hear the man moving, and it was evident that he was making an effort to get up. But the effort was vain, for he fell back heavily again.

"What did he say?" Mrs. Dockery asked her husband a minute later, when there was again a sound of some sort from the man.

"I don't know," he answered. He was standing up again.

"Harry, for Heaven's sake, do something!" she said. "We've been robbed,

and we're doing nothing. Call Lawson and the others. We've got to do something. I know the necklace is gone. Wake Mr. Gifford. How can people sleep like that. I'm going to wake Maude and Eileen."

She moved as if to leave him, but at that moment a clearer attempt at speech came from the man on the floor."

"It's Lawson!" Dockery said in a startled voice.

"Lawson?" echoed Mrs. Dockery, her tone also startled.

She felt her husband move again, and when he spoke his voice sounded as if he had knelt down again, or were leaning over the man on the floor. "Is that you, Lawson?" he asked.

There was an answering groan, but no words for a moment; then the familiar voice of the butler said clearly, but faintly:

"I'm—bad, sir—very bad. I am——"

"It *is* Lawson," said Mrs. Dockery, and the discovery seemed to restore her confidence. "What happened to you, Lawson?" she demanded in a tone of command.

"I——" He seemed unable to go on. A groan that he seemed unable to repress finished his reply.

Then the silence in the rest of the house came home to Mrs. Dockery. "What's happened to everybody?" she said. "I called and called, and nobody answered but you. I don't see how people can sleep like that. "Maude! Maude!" She shouted the name of her niece, then turned to her husband. "You'd better wake Mr. Gifford. He may have a flash. We've got to get a light. Lawson, where are all the flashes? There must be several in the house."

The butler again did not reply, nor even attempt to, for Dockery was kneeling beside him, talking to him. "What happened, Lawson?" he asked.

"Harry, for Heaven's sake!" his wife broke in. "Let's get some light first and find out what's been stolen. And get the police. For Heaven's sake *do* something! Go and wake Mr. Gifford. I'm sure he has a flash. Go and wake him and get it. How people can sleep so I don't see. Maude! Maude! Eileen!"

"Laura, be still!" Dockery said sharply. "I want to hear what happened."

"I'm going to wake Mr. Gifford," said his wife, and started down the hall, her hand on the wall to guide her. When she came to the nearest door she stopped and knocked upon it loudly; then she opened it and called: "Mr. Gifford! Mr. Gifford! Wake up!"

She stopped then to listen. In the hall her husband and the butler seemed to be listening, too, for not a sound came from either of them. And no sound came from the guest room. Leaving the door open she went on down the hall toward her niece's door, but before she had reached it the door opposite it opened, and a light flashed out. Behind the light, in the doorway, a girl appeared.

"What's the matter? What is it?" she asked in a tone of wonder.

"Oh, Eileen, thank Heaven, you have a light!" said Mrs. Dockery. "The lights have been cut off. Burglars have been in the house. Lawson's been hurt —shot or something. Give me the flash, and you go wake your father. I called him, but he didn't hear me. We've got to find out if anything's missing. It's terrible."

"Burglars?" the girl echoed, as she came on with the electric torch playing its light before her. She wore a bright-green kimono and had green slippers on her bare feet. Her reddish gold hair hung loosely about her shoulders.

"Why didn't you answer when I called you?" Mrs. Dockery asked. "I shouted and shouted. Didn't you hear me?"

"I must have, but I didn't know what had awakened me. Then I heard your voices out here, and I got up and came

out." The girl spoke calmly, and her eyes peered past Mrs. Dockery at the two men farther up the hall. She was very young, not more than eighteen, tall and slender.

"Wake your father, my dear; we must find out what's stolen," said Mrs. Dockery. "I'm worried to death, you know, about the necklace. It must have been that they were after. Give me the flash, and you wake your father. And wake Maude, too, will you? I must look after Lawson. We don't know yet what happened to him."

Without waiting for her young guest to assent, Mrs. Dockery held out her hand for the torch. As soon as she had it she turned and hurried back to her husband and the butler, who was now making an effort to get up. He was a man of about forty, with prominent eyes and dark hair, now badly ruffled. Near his left temple there was a discolored spot, a bruise that extended over his rather high cheek bone. He was very pale, but, so far as one could see, he was not injured except on his head. He moved it queerly from side to side, as if trying to ease a pain that he felt in it, and his prominent blue eyes had a dazed stare in them. He had on dark trousers and a brown dressing gown, and his bare feet were in very shabby leather slippers.

"You'd better get some clothes on, Laura," said her husband, and she seemed for the first time to realize that she was in her night robe and her bare feet. With a little gasp she turned to go into her room.

"Give me the light," said Dockery. "You don't need it."

She stopped to hand him the torch, and for the first time noticed that he was decently clad in slippers and a dressing gown.

"Oh, you stopped to dress," she said. "Why didn't you answer me when I called you?"

She did not hear his reply—that is, if he did reply—for the next thing she was conscious of was a cry from Eileen Gifford, and she turned to see the girl dart from her father's room. The light of the electric torch was not on her, and it was not until she had come up to her host and hostess that they saw her face and the look of horror on it.

"Eileen!" Mrs. Dockery at the sight forgot again her bare feet and her night robe. "What's the matter, child?"

The girl seemed unable to speak. She was trembling. "Oh—oh," she stammered in a breathless voice, "something's happened to him. Please come —please——" She caught Mrs. Dockery by the arm. "I can't wake him up."

"You can't wake him up?" Mrs. Dockery's eyes widened upon her guest, as she repeated the startling words. "What do you mean, my dear?"

"I—I—— Oh, please bring the light. I'm so frightened."

Mrs. Dockery turned and looked at her husband. He was staring at Eileen Gifford, but did not move to comply with her plea for the light, which he still held in his hand

"Go and see, Harry," she said to him.

Without a word he went down the hall to Gifford's door. Mrs. Dockery followed him, her hand in that of Gifford's young daughter. In the open doorway Dockery stopped and flashed the light of the torch he carried about the room.

"Oh, Harry!" exclaimed Mrs. Dockery at sight of the disorder in the room. "Oh, Harry!" she said again faintly. That some one had been in the room, in the drawers of the chiffonier, and in the closet and in Gifford's suit case, was plain at a glance. The drawers and closet and suit case were open, and their contents were scattered about on the floor. Apparently some one had made a hurried and frantic search of the room for something.

"Oh, Harry, if they got the necklace!" wailed Mrs. Dockery.

"Oh, *look* at father!" said Eileen Gifford. "Look at *him!*"

Dockery had played the light of the torch everywhere about the room except upon the bed. Now he focused it there, and the same evidence of disorder was revealed there as elsewhere. Apparently the seeker for the emerald necklace had searched the room thoroughly, the bed and body of the occupant as well as his belongings. The bedclothes were torn from the bed and lay trailing out upon the floor. The pillows had been pulled from under his head and thrown aside.

"Oh, Harry—oh, Heaven——"

Mrs. Dockery's voice died away. No one else spoke. All stood without moving, staring at the face of the man on the bed. Gifford, in lavender pajamas, lay on his back, his eyes wide open and bulging, his jaw hanging—a horrible sight. On his head, just under the temple line of his iron-gray hair, a dark bruise showed on his white face.

"He's dead, isn't he?"

It was the daughter who asked the needless question. But perhaps she had never seen death before and really did not know. No one answered her. Dockery turned, and the light turned with him, leaving the unsightly figure on the bed in darkness again.

"I want to talk to Lawson," Dockery said in a low voice. "I want to find out what he knows about this. Shut the door, Laura. Nobody must go in there or touch anything until the sheriff gets here."

CHAPTER V.

THE STRANGE MISSIVE.

I MUST wake Maude," said Mrs. Dockery, as she shut the door on the dead man and went quickly down the hall to the door of her niece's room. The light of the torch her husband carried penetrated the whole length of the hall, and she found the doorknob without difficulty.

"Maude!" she called sharply, as she entered the dark room. There was no response, and she felt her way to the bed. "Maude!" she said again loudly and leaned down to shake the sleeper. But the bed was empty. She could feel that it had not been disturbed.

"Maude!" she called a third time into the darkness. Then she stood rigid, trying to think. But she couldn't think in the dark like that. She must find a candle before she did anything else. There were candlesticks with candles in them on Maude's dresser, she suddenly remembered and groped her way across the room and got one. Now she had to have a match, and there were none there; Maude did not smoke. But there were matches in the guest rooms. She could find some in Eileen's room on the table by her bed.

She went back to the hall and saw that the others had gone into her husband's room. She could see the light there and hear her husband's voice questioning Lawson. No need to call Eileen; she could find the matches herself. Accordingly she stepped across the hall and opened the door of the room opposite. The arrangement of the furniture was exactly like that in her niece's room, and when she had reached the table by the bed she found to her relief that there were matches on it. A moment later she had lighted her candle and was turning to leave the room, when her eyes fell on the bed, and she stopped.

The bed had not been slept in. And on it, looking as if they had that moment been dropped there in a pile, were the clothes her young guest had worn on her arrival Saturday afternoon and had not appeared in since—a dark serge coat and skirt, a silk blouse, and a hat.

Startled, Mrs. Dockery looked around the room. But she saw nothing to arrest her attention until she noticed at her feet a pair of black Oxfords and two black stockings lying beside them.

"She hasn't been to bed at all," she

thought, staring at the clothes again. "And she said she was sound asleep."

But other things pressed in on her thoughts. Maude! Where was she? With her lighted candle she went back to her niece's room. The voices of her husband and the butler were audible to her as she crossed the hall, but she did not stop to listen. She could hear what Lawson had to tell later. She must find out first about Maude.

As she expected, the bed was undisturbed, and across the foot of it lay her niece's night robe and kimono, just as the maid had left them when she turned down the bed hours before. Raising her candle to get the light of it out of her eyes and so see around her more clearly, Mrs. Dockery went to the dresser. What was that white thing lying there on the pin tray?

A letter! Addressed to her in Maude's hand. She set the candle down and opened the letter. She could always read Maude's writing without glasses, it was so large and clear. With a premonition of what she was to find she unfolded the single sheet of paper and read:

DARLING AUNT LAURA: Forgive me, but I couldn't do it—I simply couldn't. Please tell him I hate hurting him like this, but I must marry the man I love. When you get this to-morrow morning I shall be far away, married to Jim Allen. You married for love; why shouldn't I? Uncle Harry will forgive me, I know. He'll understand. And Eileen will be glad. She hates me.

YOUR LOVING MAUDE.

Mrs. Dockery felt suddenly faint, then a deadly nausea seized her. She turned to find a chair to sit down until the feeling should pass away, but the room turned black and she could see nothing. She thought she cried out for help, but was never afterward sure whether she had succeeded in doing so or not. All she could be positive about, when she thought over the incident later, was that she had fainted, and that when she recovered consciousness Eileen Gifford was kneeling on the floor beside her, with Maude's letter in her hand, calmly reading it.

For a moment Mrs. Dockery lay without moving. It seemed to her afterward that the girl's calmness under the circumstances was most unnatural, but at the moment she was too far from calm herself to do more than note the fact that her guest was there reading the letter. And that did not seem important. What mattered was that she herself was on the floor and must have fainted. She moved to get up, and the girl dropped the letter quickly and spoke.

"How do you feel?" she asked.

"I fainted, I think. Didn't I?"

"You must have. You were on the floor unconscious when I looked in. I saw the light, you see, and knew you were in here. Can you get up, do you think?"

With a little help Mrs. Dockery managed to rise and reach a chair. She lay back and tried to pull herself together. She felt as if she were in a horrible nightmare, but knew she was not—that the horrors she had lived through were real ones.

"It was a burglar," she heard the girl saying. "He had on a black mask, Lawson says. He must have come because of the necklace. And father must have waked up, while the thief was hunting for it, and he killed him to keep him from giving an alarm. That's what Mr. Dockery thinks."

"Where is Harry?"

"He's dressing to go next door to phone. Your phone's dead; the wires have been cut."

"The phone, too?" Mrs. Dockery murmured weakly.

"Yes; it must have been planned ahead. I told father he oughtn't to bring a valuable thing like that necklace down here before the detectives came to guard the house. You can't buy anything like that without having lots of people know about it—jewelry thieves,

I mean. They watch the jewelry places like hawks. And I guess they work with the clerks in them. It was a perfectly mad thing for father to do. I told him so."

Mrs. Dockery got up. The note from Maude was on the floor, and she stopped to pick it up. But Miss Gifford did it for her.

"Where's Maude?" she asked.

Taken aback by the cool question Mrs. Dockery did not reply. "I must see Harry," she said. "He mustn't go out of this house alone; it isn't safe." She went to the dresser and picked up the lighted candle.

"Wait," said Miss Gifford. "I'll light the other candle." And while she did so she continued. "Mr. Dockery told me to tell you to wake the maids and tell them to dress. He said for us to dress, too. He said the sheriff will want to see every one in the house as soon as he comes." And having delivered her message she went to her own room, carrying the candle.

With a candle in one hand and her niece's letter in the other, Mrs. Dockery made her way weakly down the hall toward her husband's room. But hearing the butler's voice, as she approached, and remembering that she had not yet put on anything over her night robe, she stopped at her own room to get her kimono and slippers.

"I must tell Harry about Maude," she thought; and when she had her kimono and slippers on she went through the bathroom into his room. He was fully dressed now, walking up and down the room, while Lawson, still in his dressing gown, and looking very white, was seated. As she entered, he made a move to get up, but sank back as if unable to keep his feet.

"Sit still," said Dockery to him. "You're groggy still from that blow on your head. We'll get the doctor here as soon as we can." He turned to his wife. "Our telephone connection has been cut. I'll have to go next door to phone."

"Not now," she said quickly. "It isn't safe. You don't know but that somebody may still be prowling about."

"No danger of that," Dockery answered. "But where's Maude? Have you told her?"

Mrs. Dockery did not reply to the question. She did not care to make her disclosure about her niece before the servant. "I want to go and wake the maids," she said, moving toward the door. There she turned. "Hadn't Lawson better go to his room to bed?"

The butler rose again. "I think I'd better do that, sir," he said to Dockery.

"All right, maybe you had," agreed the latter. "I'll help you upstairs. You'll be more comfortable in bed. And the sheriff can see you there as well as asywhere else."

"Call the maids while you're upstairs, Harry," his wife said. "Then come right down. I don't want to be alone here."

"You might as well dress," he answered, as he and the butler left the room.

Mrs. Dockery stood in the doorway looking after them, then went back through the bathroom into her own room and began to get some clothes together to put on. It was slow work by the dim light of one slender candle and in her disturbed state of mind. She had made little progress when she heard her husband's step in the hall. She went to the door and called him in.

"Where's Maude?" he exclaimed, as soon as he had closed the door, and they were alone. "Do you know she's not in her room?"

"She's run away with that young fellow, Allen."

"What!"

"There's the letter she left on her dresser." She pointed to the table by her bed where the letter lay. He took it up without speaking and read it through rapidly.

"That explains Lawson's story," he said. "He heard Allen call to her."

"*Call* to her?"

"She must have left here just before Gifford was——"

"What's the matter?" Mrs. Dockery asked when her husband stopped abruptly. And when he did not answer her question she asked another. "Lawson heard Allen call to Maude?"

"Yes—he must have."

"When?"

"Just before he came downstairs. That was why he came down. He heard some one call—a man, he says, but he didn't know the voice and didn't make out what it was he called—what name. He thought it was some fellow of Katherine's—that she was down there with him. So he got up and came down to see about it—to send the fellow about his business and make her come in. But it must have been Allen and Maude he heard."

"He wouldn't have called to her on that side of the house. Her room's on the other side."

"She was probably downstairs at the side door waiting for him. They must just have gone when——" Again Dockery paused.

"When what?"

"When Gifford was—murdered." Dockery turned his face from his wife, and in the flickering candle light it looked strange to her—pale and haggard, as she had never seen it.

"Harry! What are you thinking of?"

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"You don't think that—that boy—Allen—*did* it?"

He was silent.

"Harry, he couldn't have—it would be too horrible!"

Dockery frowned and looked away again. He still said nothing.

"What else did Lawson say? I thought he said it was a burglar in a black mask. That's what Eileen told me he said."

"It's what he thought—and I thought, but I didn't know about Maude then."

"Oh, my God—my God!" Mrs. Dockery was wringing her hands. In the dim light, half-clad as she was, her hair loose about her shadowy face, she looked as strange to her husband as he to her. "Oh, will this hideous night never end?" she wailed. "I'll go mad if anything else happens."

"Be quiet. Control yourself," her husband said. "We've got to think what to do about Maude. Gifford's death is bad enough without having Maude dragged into it."

"Maude! What are you talking about? Maude dragged in?"

"If she's married Allen, and Allen did it——"

"Oh, don't say such things. I'll go mad if you talk like that. Why should Allen have done it?"

"For the necklace, of course. He has nothing, you know that. And it was right after Lawson heard a voice outside that he came down and met the murderer coming from Gifford's room."

"The man in the mask?"

"Yes."

"What else did Lawson say?"

"He said when he got downstairs to this floor he was coming down the hall very quietly, so as not to disturb anybody, when he heard a door open, then close very cautiously—Gifford's door. That struck him as very odd. What would Gifford leave his room at that time of night for, he wondered. Then, he says, he heard steps—cautious steps—coming toward him, and because he wasn't armed in any way he did the first thing that occurred to him. He felt along the wall beside him for the electric light that he knew was there and switched it on."

"The light? Was it on then?"

"Yes, and he saw right in front of him a man with a black mask over his face and his hat pulled down low over it. He says the man gave a jump when

the light went on, then started for him with a pistol. He had nothing to defend himself with, and there was no time to call out for help, so he struck out at the man with his fist. And he says he hit him—that is, he thinks he did. Then the man struck him an awful blow on the head with the pistol, and that was the last he knew for some time. When he came to he was lying on the floor with his head paining horribly. He was all groggy, hasn't got over it yet. He says he lay for a while waiting and listening and then began to crawl toward my door to wake me. But he was so dizzy, and it was so dark, he kept knocking into the wall. He thinks he must have become unconscious again, because he didn't know anything then until he found us bending over him. Now——"

"What?"

"If Lawson really did hit the man in the face—with his fist—hard—as he thinks he did—there'll be a bad bruise as evidence. So if Allen hasn't any such mark on his face, that will let him out. Don't you see?"

"Yes, of course, but what about the necklace? Oughtn't we see if—if it's gone?"

Dockery frowned and shook his head. "No," he said. "We mustn't go into the room—mustn't touch a thing in there until the authorities get here. I've locked the room to make sure about that."

"Locked it? Both doors?"

"Both doors?"

"Yes—the one into the bathroom—between his room and Eileen's—did you lock that, too?" Mrs. Dockery asked.

"No, never thought of it, but she wouldn't go in there—a girl like that. I'd hate to do it myself."

"I know, but——"

"But what?"

"Nothing. I—I must get dressed. What time do you think they'll get here—the sheriff and the others?"

"I don't know. They'll probably not get here for an hour or more."

"What time is it now?"

Dockery took out his watch. "It's nearly half past four. It'll be daylight probably before any one gets here."

"Harry!"

He had turned to go, but now stopped and looked around, struck by his wife's tone. "What's the matter?" he asked.

She came nearer to him before she answered and spoke in a lower tone than before: "Eileen was out to-night—at least she hasn't been to bed."

"Not been to bed?"

"I went to her room for matches, and her bed hadn't been slept in. And her serge suit and her hat were on the bed. They looked as if she had just taken them off in a hurry and thrown them there. And she told me she was asleep and didn't hear me calling. She said she didn't know what woke her up, but she heard our voices in the hall and came out. But you noticed, didn't you, that she stopped to put on her slippers and that hideous green kimono of hers before she came. And she had a flash. She knew the lights were cut off. How did she know it?"

Tried them, I suppose, as I did. Now look here, Laura"—Dockery's tone was very serious—"you be careful, you hear, about what you say. You're making a terrible charge against the girl, a charge you can't prove, and you'll get us all into trouble if you say anything like that to anybody but me."

"I'm not making a charge," Mrs. Dockery returned stubbornly. "All I say is that she lied when she told us she was in bed asleep when her father was murdered. You seem very sure it was Maude and young Allen that Lawson heard at the side porch, but it may have been Eileen and some man. And if she didn't have anything to do with—what happened to her father—she ought to know something about it, as much as Lawson does anyhow, if she

came home just at that time. If she was on the porch when Lawson heard somebody there, and if she was in her room when I found Lawson in the hall, then she came upstairs while her father was being murdered, or right afterward—didn't she?"

Dockery did not reply. He was staring before him with a fixed, startled gaze. Mrs. Dockery went on in her tense whisper:

"If she came up afterward she would have seen the man in the mask that Lawson saw, wouldn't she? Why didn't he knock her down, too? And why doesn't she say something about seeing him? Why does she say she was in bed fast asleep at the time? I know she wasn't asleep—that much I'm sure of! She lied about that. And why did she lie? And if she came upstairs after the masked man left the house, she must have heard Lawson on the floor groaning. Why didn't she investigate? Why did she go to her room and stay there until she *had* to come out?"

Dockery still did not reply, and his wife again went on in her tense, excited whisper:

"And when I was in Maude's room I fainted—after I read her note—it was such a shock after all the rest—and when I came to I saw Eileen beside me calmly reading Maude's note that I had dropped when I fainted. Afterward she asked me where Maude was, as if she didn't know—hadn't read the note. She's sly, Harry. I wouldn't believe a word she said about anything."

"Well, be careful, you hear? It's none of our business what she says, or what she knows."

"She'll probably lie to the sheriff, too, just as she has to us."

"Well, what if she does? It's not our business, is it?"

"It's our business if she lets people think Maude was mixed up in the thing to shield herself."

"Well, you be careful what you say. When you're questioned you tell what you *know*—not what you think or suspect. They won't want to hear anything like that, and it's dangerous making charges you can't prove. The girl might retaliate by making charges against us."

"Against *us?*" She stared at him wide-eyed. "What do you mean?"

"She can say anything she likes—if we make trouble for her."

"Make trouble? Harry, what do you mean? What are you talking about? Do you know something?"

"I?" He turned away. "Of course not. What I mean is—you're saying things that mustn't be repeated—about the girl not having been to bed—having been out—and all that, and I'm just warning you not to say such things to other people, or you'll get us both into trouble. It's no business of ours what she was doing, is it?"

He opened the door to leave the room, but the next moment drew back sharply. "What's the matter?" his wife asked.

"Nothing," he muttered.

She pushed by him and looked out into the hall. Down at the rear end of it she saw Eileen Gifford near the door of her own room. Her back was turned, and she was walking with quick noiseless steps, holding her lighted candle high in front of her. She still wore her soft-soiled bedroom slippers and her green kimono. As she turned to enter her room, Mrs. Dockery drew in her head quickly. She looked at her husband. Then she closed the door.

"Do you suppose she was outside listening?" he asked.

"I don't know," she returned. "I thought she was in her room dressing. I tell you, and you mark my words, Harry—she's up to something. She's got to be watched. You saw what Maude said in her note about her."

"I must phone the sheriff," he said.

To be continued in next week's issue of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE.

The Avenging Twins Try It Again

by

Johnston McCulley

Author of "The Blotted Slip," "Accusing Lips," etc,

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

THE Avenging Twins, Peter and Paul Selbon, select an eccentric millionaire, Otto Larchney, as their second victim to rob. They have already disposed of the first of their list of six men who were instrumental in ruining their uncle, Ellis Selbon. It is Peter's turn to devise the scheme and perform the robbery with Paul's assistance. To this end Peter has ascertained that a picture, stolen from a museum in Italy, is in the possession of Otto Larchney. To steal this valued treasure Peter decides to gain entrance to Larchney's residence that very night. On the way Peter is overtaken by two of Detective Griff's men and assaulted. Paul, who is shadowing his brother, arrives at the proper moment, and together Peter and Paul beat up the two men, taking them prisoners to the residence of Larchney, where they gain entrance. Detective Griff is there, and The Avenging Twins, after delivering their prisoners, are ordered to leave. But one of the twins remains.

CHAPTER V.

IN THE GALLERY.

THE attack by the two detectives and their subsequent downfall had given Peter Selbon a chance to get inside the Larchney residence, which was more than he had expected to do when he had left the apartment house. And now he chuckled softly to find his fondest hopes realized through the actions of another, and that other a particular foe. Peter felt that things were coming his way, that good fortune balanced the scale for him.

The few minutes spent in the house with Paul, though there had been continual conversation and controversy, gave him the chance to note the general arrangement of the ground floor of the mansion. It was not much, but he felt it was better than nothing. He knew where the art gallery was located, at least, and what rooms opened off the front hall.

And that was all the knowledge that he expected to acquire as he went with Paul through the front hall and to the door. But as they stepped out on the veranda the thought flashed through Peter Selbon's mind that Detective Milton Griff had played into his hands unknowingly.

Griff had blown his whistle to summon the servants and guards to demonstrate to The Avenging Twins that the Larchney place was well protected. And none knew better than Peter that Griff had done it to give his men a chance to see the twins at close range, that they might identify them later.

But, by the same move, Detective Milton Griff had gathered his men in the gallery, and for the moment there was none in the grounds.

Stepping through the door, Peter and Paul found it closed behind them. The next instant they saw the servant who had closed it hurry back to the gallery at Griff's command. That was when Detective Griff promised dire consequences if guards and servants did not keep their eyes open thereafter.

Peter acted on impulse. He whispered to Paul, glanced through the glass upper half of the door again, and saw that there was no one in the hall, reopened the door softly, and slipped inside. He was in the Larchney residence, and the others inside imagined that he had departed. Paul chuckled and hurried through the darkness to the avenue, getting away and out of sight as speedily as possible. He realized as well as his brother had that good fortune had aided them.

Once inside and the door closed again, Peter darted along the front hall for a distance of a few feet and hurried into the first room on the right. It was a sort of living room, filled with comfortable furniture. There were a dozen cozy nooks, easy-chairs, divans, davenports, a score of places in which a man might hide safely unless there was a deliberate and careful search of the house for him. Peter judged that it would do for the time being.

He hurried to one corner of the room and got beneath a divan. There were a couple of floor lamps burning in the room, but they did not illuminate it brilliantly. Stretched on the floor, Peter made himself as comfortable as possible. He could hear Detective Griff talking in the distance.

"Back to your posts," Griff was saying. "And remember what I told you!"

Peter heard men going through the hall, and after a time Griff came along the hall with Otto Larchney.

"It is your office I am particular about, Mr. Larchney," the detective said. "I am going there now and urge my men to watch carefully. You'll be all right here, Mr. Larchney. There are half a dozen men scattered around the grounds, and I'll have them relieved by others in the morning. And you are amply protected inside the house by your servants."

"That man of yours will remain all night in the gallery?" Larchney asked.

"Yes, and be relieved by another in the morning."

"I'll have one of the servants in the hall on the second floor, too," Larchney said.

"Good idea. One that you can trust to keep awake and be ready to act quickly," Griff said.

The detective took his leave. Otto Larchney went back along the hall. Peter remained beneath the divan. He glanced at the radium dial of his watch and found that it was only a few minutes after ten o'clock.

He would have a long and tiresome wait, he told himself, but it would be worth it. After a few hours had passed there would be only two men alert in the house, and he knew where they would be—one in the gallery and one in the hall on the upper floor.

His first task, he told himself, would be to locate "The Crimson Sunset." Certainly Larchney did not keep it in the art gallery in plain view. Yet it might be in the gallery just the same, hidden, Peter told himself. He would have to investigate there first, despite the presence of the guard.

Minutes of inaction pass slowly, he found, and Peter naturally was active, which made it a deal worse. Stretched on the floor beneath the divan he fussed and fumed and wished that the hours would pass swifter. He scarcely dared move. He could not smoke. And it was hot beneath the divan, and uncomfortable.

After what seemed an age to Peter a servant came into the room. Peter almost held his breath, and he made ready to take measures to protect himself, but the man did not approach the divan. He looked at the windows, glanced rapidly around the room, and then snapped out the lights and retired to the hall again. Peter could hear him at the front door, and then at other windows. He was closing the house for the night.

Half an hour later Peter crawled from beneath the divan and stretched himself. But he did not leave the corner of the room. He was prepared to dart back to his hiding place again instantly if any one approached.

He paced back and forth in the corner, stopping now and then to listen. Once he heard voices on the second floor and supposed that Larchney was giving the servant there his instructions. A door slammed in the distance. Then the house was quiet.

But Peter was in no hurry to act. None realized better than he that a man on guard generally is very alert for the first couple of hours or so. After that he grows accustomed to his surroundings and is inclined to be careless.

Peter waited until the hands of his watch pointed to the hour of midnight. Then he took his mask from his pocket and slipped it on, drew thin rubber gloves over his hands, made sure that his automatic pistol was in readiness, and slipped along the wall of the room to the hall door.

The door was draped with old-fashioned portières. Peter Selbon removed the cords from them, made a coil of the soft rope, and fastened the coil to his belt. For a moment he listened at the door, then slipped like a shadow into the hall.

There was a single incandescent night light burning there, but it gave enough light to betray his presence if any one happened to glance through the glass half of the front door. Slipping along the wall, Peter came to the light. He hesitated for a moment; he did not like to extinguish it, for that might attract the attention of the guards outside. And, if he allowed it to remain burning, one of them might look in and see him. He took it for granted that Griff had instructed one of the men to glance into the hall now and then.

He decided to leave it burning, since the shadows were deep and fitful farther along the hall. Once more he crept silently back to the door of the living room and stopped for a moment to listen. Not a sound reached his ears.

Out into the hall he went boldly and hurried to the door of the art gallery. It was closed. Peter knelt and looked through the keyhole. Good fortune was with him again, for he could see the guard. The man was sitting at one end of the long table in the middle of the room, with his back toward the door. He was reading a newspaper.

Holding his automatic in readiness in his right hand, Peter turned the knob of the door with his left. Now came the dangerous period. He could not look through the keyhole as he opened the door. The guard inside might happen to turn and observe the door being opened, in which case he would be on his feet, weapon held ready, when Peter entered.

The hinges did not make a sound. Peter thrust the door open an inch at a time, but as quickly as he dared. And presently he could peer inside. He noticed that the man remained in the same position as before, his interest centered on the newspaper.

Peter slipped inside and closed the door behind him as softly as he had opened it. He was within twenty feet of the guard. He stepped forward noiselessly, watching the man before him carefully. The guard turned a page of the newspaper, folded it, cleared his throat, and started reading again. Peter silently thanked the man who had written the newspaper article the guard was reading.

He took another step forward, and another. He was so close now that he could spring upon the guard if circumstances compelled him to do so. But he did not want a fight and a tumult. Above all, he did not want to arouse the house.

The guard suddenly seemed aware of another presence in the gallery. He

dropped the newspaper and started to turn around, reaching for his revolver. But his hand never touched it.

Peter Selbon hurled himself forward, and his left arm went around the guard's neck and under his chin. Peter squeezed. This was a little trick that he and Paul had learned on the pampas of South America, a gentle little trick used often by the natives there. It is a method of rendering a man unconscious without doing him a permanent injury. A sore throat for a few days is the sum of the damage.

Peter had no scruples about this.

The guard struggled for a moment ineffectually and then was still. Peter stretched him upon the floor and worked rapidly. With the cords he had taken from the portières he lashed the man's wrists and ankles. He gagged him, and even bandaged his eyes. And then he rolled him to a corner and left him there.

For the moment Peter Selbon was having things all his own way. He made a rapid inspection of the paintings upon the walls. Only a few of them were the same size as "The Crimson Sunset," regarding which Peter had obtained certain facts, and to those few he gave his particular attention.

It had flashed through Peter's mind that the famous purloined painting might be fastened to the back of another of the same size, or be in a double frame. But it took him less than fifteen minutes to satisfy himself that such was not the case.

Then he opened drawers in the bottom of cabinets, finding many valuable objects of art, but not what he sought. He began examining the walls. A secret panel might hide the painting, he knew, though he doubted it. Men must be hired when a secret panel is constructed in a wall, and he discredited the idea that Larchney would have taken mechanics into his confidence.

"It's not in the gallery," Peter mused. "Didn't think that it was, but it was necessary to make sure."

He glanced at the guard in the corner and saw that the man was still unconscious. For a moment Peter stood in the middle of the room beside the long table, trying to decide where to search next. And suddenly he flinched, almost sprang away from the table. A buzzer had sounded.

Peter knew instantly what it was—the buzzer of the telephone that was fastened to one end of the table beside which he was standing.

It was a call from the outside, and it was pregnant with possibilities. It might be Detective Milton Griff or one of his men calling at a stated hour to see whether the guard was attending to his business. And if the call was not answered suspicion might be aroused.

CHAPTER VI.

A PUZZLED GUARD.

PETER SELBON hesitated only a moment. Then he picked up the receiver and spoke softly into the mouthpiece.

"Hello," he said.

"Riley?" a voice asked over the wire.

"Uh!" Peter grunted.

"This is Griff, Riley. I forgot to tell you that Larchney said one of the servants would bring you coffee and sandwiches about one o'clock."

"Uh!" Peter grunted again.

"Everything all right?"

"Uh!"

"You keep your eyes and ears open, Riley. What's the matter with your voice?"

"Don't want to wake everybody up—talking low," Peter grunted into the transmitter.

"All right. I just thought that I'd tell you about the lunch so you wouldn't start shooting when the man came with it. I'll call later. Good-by."

Peter Selbon replaced the receiver

upon the hook quickly. He glanced at his watch and found that it was only a few minutes until one o'clock. The servant might come with the lunch at any moment.

Peter rushed to the corner, made sure that the guard had not returned to consciousness, and then removed the cords, which he looped and fastened to his belt again. He removed the gag and the eye bandage and then pulled the unconscious man back across the room to the chair in which he had been sitting before Peter's attack. Peter propped him up in the chair and spread the newspaper across his lap. The guard gave every appearance of a man who had fallen asleep while reading.

Then Peter started toward the hall door. But he came to a quick stop when he was only halfway across the room. Some one had knocked.

It was the servant with the lunch, Peter supposed. He glanced rapidly around the room. Within a few feet of the door were two tall cabinets with solid backs and glass fronts, filled with objects of art. Peter rushed silently across the room and got behind the cabinets.

The knock was repeated. The guard moaned once, but made no reply. Peter almost chuckled. The man would return to consciousness, he knew, just at the proper moment.

He heard the servant in the hall utter an exclamation, and then the door was opened. The man came into the room carrying a tray. He hurried across to the table.

"I've brought you sandwiches and coffee, sir," he said, putting the tray down upon the table. "If there is anything else you wish—— Wake up, sir!"

The guard moaned again, rolled his head from side to side, and then opened his eyes. He stared vacantly.

"Can it be that you have been asleep, sir?" the servant gasped out.

Suddenly the guard seemed to come to life. For an instant one hand clutched at his throat, and then he had sprang out of the chair.

"You—you——" he gasped out.

"Sir, your lunch," the servant said again.

"You—I——"

"You have been asleep, sir," the servant charged. "Isn't it rather dangerous under the circumstances?"

The guard seemed to be stunned for a moment. And then he whirled and glanced around the room.

"I—I was strangled——" he began. "How long have you been here?"

"Why, I just came in. You didn't answer when I knocked at the door."

"I must have been unconscious."

"Afraid, sir, that you were asleep," the guard said, smiling. "But I'll not say anything about it, sir. It's a sleepy job."

"I remember now," the guard gasped out. "I was attacked and strangled."

"You were sitting in the chair with the newspaper spread out on your lap."

"I tell you that I was attacked. Some one strangled me and put me to sleep!"

The detective darted to the middle of the room, looked wildly around it, ran to the door and glanced out into the hall, and then ran back again like a cornered, bewildered rat.

"My throat is sore," he said. "I haven't been asleep or dreaming. And I've been gagged! I can tell by the way my mouth feels."

"I think you've been asleep."

"Confound it, I know when I have been attacked and strangled!" the detective declared angrily. "Call that man in the hall upstairs. We'll search the house."

"You'd better be sensible," the servant protested. "You don't want to make a fool of yourself. Nobody could get into the house without setting off an alarm, and none has sounded."

"I tell you——"

"You were sitting in that chair asleep, and you woke up when I put the tray on the table," the servant accused.

"I wasn't asleep! I was unconscious! I don't understand just what happened, but I know that I've been handled," Detective Riley declared. "You call that man upstairs and do it in a hurry!"

The servant finally seemed to be convinced by the detective's manner that something was wrong. But he did not intend to arouse the household unless there was a real reason for it.

"If you ask me, you've been dreaming," he said. "I'll get the man upstairs, but I won't raise any fuss."

He darted to the door and through it, leaving it standing open. Detective Riley followed him and glanced up and down the hall. It was lighted well enough for him to see at a glance that no one was in it. He started back into the gallery again.

And once more Peter Selbon sprang forward noiselessly and looped an arm around the man's throat and beneath his chin, and once more he squeezed. He had scant time in which to work, he knew, for the servant already was hurrying up the stairs and soon would return with the man who had been acting as guard on the second floor.

Detective Riley struggled for a moment, grunted once or twice, and finally succumbed. Peter Selbon pulled him across the room quickly and tossed him into the chair again. And then he ran out into the hall and into the living room once more and to his old hiding place beneath the divan.

Without being able to see, he could hear. Down the stairs came the servant and the man who had been on guard. They hurried into the gallery.

"Asleep again," Peter heard the servant say.

"The man's either crazy or drunk," the upstairs guard returned. "There'd have been an alarm if any one got into the house. We'd better tell Mr. Larchney and have another man put in here. Can't trust this fellow. Let's get him awake."

Peter left the divan and made his way slowly to the door. He went along the hall for a short distance and came to where he could look into the gallery. The two men were shaking Detective Riley and trying to get him awake.

Peter darted silently past the door and went up the stairs as rapidly as he could. There he ran along the hall toward the front of the house. He was seeking a safe hiding place on the second floor, for he had work to do there.

But there seemed no safe place in the front of the house, and so Peter Selbon hurried toward the rear. On one side of the hall he found a door that seemed to open into a closet. Peter opened it. It was a large closet, he found, and half filled with old clothes and pasteboard boxes. Peter went into it and closed the door behind him. He got behind the hanging clothes and made sure that they covered him well.

There was silence for a moment, and then Peter heard some one coming up the stairs rapidly. Whoever he was, he was not taking the trouble to be quiet about his progress. Then Peter heard some one pounding upon a door, and a man's voice.

"Mr. Larchney! Mr. Larchney, sir!"

There was another moment of silence, and then the man knocked again.

"Mr. Larchney," he called. "Are you awake, sir? Something seems to be wrong with the detective in the gallery, sir. He—he seems to be unconscious. I thought it best to inform you——"

"What's that?" another voice cried.

Peter was bold enough to open the door of the closet for a couple of inches. He could look down the hall toward the front stairs. He saw another door opened down the hall; saw Otto Larchney suddenly appear, clad in a bath robe.

"What is it?" Larchney demanded, fear in his voice and manner.

"The detective in the gallery, sir," the servant replied. "We found him unconscious when we took him his lunch. He said that he had been attacked."

Otto Larchney gave an exclamation of mingled surprise and fear and hurried down the stairs, the servant at his heels.

CHAPTER VII.

A SHOCK FOR LARCHNEY.

THE detective was rolling his head from side to side and moaning slightly like a very sick man when Larchney entered the gallery. Presently he tried to sit up, and one of the servants supported him.

"Is the man intoxicated?" Larchney demanded. "Or is he ill?"

None answered him, and he stepped closer. Riley seemed to come from his spell of unconsciousness quickly. He staggered to his feet, holding his hands to his throat. He gasped for breath, struggled to speak.

"I—I was attacked again," he gasped out.

"What do you mean? Who could have done it?" Larchney asked. "There was no noise."

"I don't know. I can't understand it," the detective replied. "I was sitting here reading and somebody slipped up behind me and throttled me. When I came back to life I was in the chair and your man was here with my lunch. I told him that I had been attacked. He went to call the man upstairs, and I looked out into the hall. And as I was turning back into this room I was attacked and throttled again."

Otto Larchney deliberately sniffed. "The story doesn't sound good," he commented. "You must have imagined the thing. How could it have happened? Did you have a fight?"

"No! It happened too quick for that," the detective declared. "The way he grabbed me I was helpless. My throat seemed to close. I saw red flashes, and then I lost consciousness. And you needn't look like you thought I was lying. Believe it or not! And don't try to tell me that I have been asleep. Sleep wouldn't make my throat this sore!"

"But there is nobody in the house who would do such a thing," Larchney protested. "How could there be? How could they get in without setting off the alarms?"

"There never has been a burglar alarm made that some smooth crook couldn't get around, and there never will be," the detective declared. "Suit yourself about it, but if it was me I'd have this house searched right now, and searched good. But go ahead and take a chance if you want to."

Otto Larchney began to show some alarm. The detective seemed to be sure of himself and his statements.

"Possibly I'd better telephone to Mr. Griff," Larchney said.

"That isn't necessary at all," Riley declared. "We can do the work without bothering Griff. Call in a couple of men from the outside and search the house, that is my suggestion. We want to act quickly. I'll call them."

On the upper floor of the residence Peter Selbon had left the closet and crept to the top of the stairs to listen to the conversation. Peering over, he saw the detective walk into the hall and hurry to the front door. He unlocked the door, opened it, and whistled. Almost instantly a couple of the guards were standing at his side.

Riley waited for the others and gave them orders to watch the exterior of the house carefully. He led two of the men back to the door of the gallery. There he paused.

"Leave one of your servants in this room, Mr. Larchney," the detective commanded. "The rest of us will go

through the house from cellar to garret."

"I still think that I should telephone to Mr. Griff," Larchney declared.

"Not necessary to bother him," Riley replied. "We can handle this affair. Let's get busy! We'll start on the upper floor, Mr. Larchney, if you'll lead the way."

They hurried up the stairs, and Otto Larchney directed them first to the servants' quarters in the rear. The other servants were aroused and their rooms searched well. Every closet was inspected. Every door and window was found to be closed and locked. Not one of the burning night lights had been extinguished. There was nothing to indicate the presence of an intruder in the house.

They searched every room and every hall on the upper floor with the exception of the personal suite of Otto Larchney, and then they came to that.

"I am commencing to believe that this is ridiculous," Larchney declared. "Surely there is nobody in the house who does not belong here. Those two Selbon boys left it before Detective Griff, and they couldn't have got in since without setting off the alarm."

"I know when I'm throttled!" Riley declared.

"Perhaps it was an attack of illness."

Detective Riley considered that statement for a moment while the others watched him. Riley had not caught sight of Peter during either of the two attacks, but he told himself that he certainly had felt the pressure of another man's body against his own, had felt the sudden pressure of an arm about his throat and of a hand beneath his chin. He did not pretend to understand it exactly, but he knew that he had been attacked, and by a human being. It had not been sudden illness clutching at his throat.

"Either I was throttled or else I'm going crazy," the detective declared.

"But who could have done it?" Larchney asked.

"If there isn't somebody in this house who doesn't belong here, then one of your servants did it," Riley said. "And I don't think a servant did. So we'll go ahead with the search."

"There is nothing left on this upper floor except my own suite of rooms," Larchney said.

"We'll look 'em over!"

"But such a person would not hide there. And I came from the suite a short time ago."

"He's had time to dodge in there while we were in the gallery," Riley declared.

They searched the little parlor, the bedroom, and glanced into the dressing room. They searched the bath. And they found nobody. Detective Riley left one of the men on guard at the top of the stairs and conducted the others below. The man in the gallery had seen nothing, heard nothing. Neither had another man Riley had left in the lower hall.

The lower floor was searched from one end of the house to the other. They descended into the basement and searched the storerooms, the furnace room, even the coal bunkers. And they found no intruder and no trace of one.

"I felt certain that there was nobody in the house," Larchney said. "I have faith in my alarm system. And had there been any one here we certainly should have found them. Mr. Riley, perhaps you did have an attack of illness and imagined things. I have heard of such attacks."

"I had an attack, but it wasn't illness," Riley declared in reply. "It gets me! Maybe I dreamed it, but I'm ready to swear that I didn't."

"Perhaps you'd better have one of the other men remain in the gallery with you for the rest of the night," Larchney said. "Let the others go outside and return to their posts, and the

one man go to the upper hall again. I do not anticipate any further disturbance."

"You're still thinking that I have made all this fuss about nothing?" Riley said. "Have it your own way, Mr. Larchney. But I tell you I was throttled."

"Do you accuse one of my servants of throttling you? No? Then who could have done it, since there is no one else in the house?" Larchney said.

Detective Riley's face grew red, and he stammered words that could not be understood, but which sounded suspiciously like oaths. Riley knew what he knew, and was angry because he could make no sensible reply to Otto Larchney. He was puzzled, and he was a man who did not like puzzles.

Gruffly he ordered the men back to their posts and reëntered the gallery with one he selected. He sat down at the end of the table and attacked his belated lunch.

"Sorry that I got you out of bed, Mr. Larchney," he said. "But I know what I know, and I was throttled!"

"Perhaps the unusual surroundings, nervousness——" Otto Larchney began.

"I'm no baby, Mr. Larchney, and you'd better not intimate that I am a coward. Unusual surroundings don't work that way with me. Any doctor in the city will tell you that I am not nervous. I say that I was throttled!"

Otto Larchney smiled slightly and retired to the hall, closing the door of the gallery behind him. The man who was to remain on guard on the upper floor already was at his post. Larchney made sure that the front door had been locked again. The servants who were not sharing the guard duty had returned to their rooms and their beds.

Larchney went slowly up the stairs, thinking on the puzzle. He felt sure that the detective had imagined the entire thing, else really had been ill, and he decided to ask Griff to assign a different man the following night. Larchney felt no fear whatever; he trusted his expensive burglar-alarm system.

Entering his suite, he closed the door and turned the key in the lock. He passed through the parlor, snapped out the lights, and entered his bedchamber. He removed bathrobe and slippers and walked across the room to the bed. His sleep had been broken, and he was a man who liked regular sleep.

"He imagined the whole thing," Larchney muttered. "Throttled, indeed! And nobody in the house except the servants. I suppose my old butler throttled him."

Otto Larchney reached down to turn back the covers, intending to get a few hours of sleep. As his hand touched the pillow his eyes suddenly bulged, his lower jaw dropped loosely in amazement, and he sucked in his breath sharply. He drew his hand back as though from a serpent's strike, hesitated a moment, and then stretched it forward once more.

On the pillow there was a scrap of paper. And on the paper were some words that had been written with a pencil, evidently quickly scrawled. Otto Larchney read the message: "Thanks for 'The Crimson Sunset.'"

CHAPTER VIII.

"THE CRIMSON SUNSET."

AS he watched from the top of the stairs, Peter Selbon had seen Detective Riley and the others prepare to start up to make their search, and he realized that it was necessary for him to hide himself speedily.

Peter knew better than to hide in the closet off the hall, for it would be one of the first places that they would investigate. And he did not have a great deal of time in which to think it over and make a decision. Detective Riley already was leading the others up the stairs.

He darted back along the hall, came to the door of Otto Larchney's private suite, and hurried through it. The first glance told him that there was no secure hiding place in the little parlor. He went on into the bedchamber, but did not find the place he sought there. Beneath the bed was the only spot where a man could hide, and surely one of the searchers would look there immediately.

A glance into the bathroom showed Peter that it was one of ordinary arrangement, with no place to hide except behind the curtains of the shower, and he dared not attempt that. There was nothing but the dressing room left.

Peter hurried into that. Otto Larchney, it appeared, was no miser when it came to clothes. There were racks of clothes for every possible occasion. There were stacks of boots and shoes on special shelves. And there were long, deep shelves near the ceiling, upon which were pasteboard boxes evidently filled with shirts and socks and other articles of apparel.

The search already had commenced in the hall now, and Peter had no time to waste. He could hear the men as they worked, calling to one another; he heard Riley's voice in command. He piled to one side some of the large pasteboard boxes and managed to crawl upon the top shelf. Stretching himself at the back of it and working with one hand, he succeeded in arranging the boxes in front of him as they had been before.

Peter realized that he was in a precarious position, that nothing but good fortune could save him. He scarcely dared breathe. He heard the men searching the other rooms, and finally heard them in Larchney's personal suite. He knew that they had gone through the parlor and the bedchamber, knew that one man was in the bathroom. And then the door of the dressing room was opened.

He held his breath. If he was discovered he could only attempt a flight, disconcerting them by pistol fire and running the risk of receiving a bullet himself. A few feet below him Riley was fussing around the racks of clothes. He seemed to be taking his time.

Peter thought they never would be done. But finally he heard the detective go out of the dressing room. "Nobody in there," he heard Riley say. "And that settles the upper floor. We'll probably find our man below, possibly in the basement."

Remaining stretched out upon the shelf, the perspiration streaming from his face and throat and hands, Peter Selbon gave thanks that at last they were gone, but realized that he was not yet out of the trap. After a time he heard them talking on the lower floor, and when he decided that they would not search above again, he piled the boxes away and got down from the shelf.

He crept out into the bedchamber and through it to the little parlor. For a time he listened there at the door. Sounds from below told him of the progress of the search. He dared not open the door and go to the head of the stairs to listen, for he was afraid of a guard on the upper floor.

Peter felt that he had passed the first dangerous moment, and now his mind went back to the real object of his presence in the house. He disliked to think of remaining in hiding throughout an entire day. He was eager to complete his work, as far as Otto Larchney was concerned, this very night.

So he took a small notebook from his pocket and scribbled the message on a sheet of paper, tore out the sheet, and put it upon Larchney's pillow. And then he hurried back to the dressing room. He did not get upon the uncomfortable shelf again. But he got back into a corner where he was well masked by half a score of hanging suits

of clothes, and there he felt that he would be safe for the time being.

There he waited, while on the floor below the guards were sent outside again, and Detective Riley and one man retired to the gallery. The guard on the upper floor took up his station, and Otto Larchney came back into his personal suite, locked the door, and went into his bedchamber.

Peter Selbon had not put that written message on Larchney's pillow merely as a show of bravado. He knew that "The Crimson Sunset" was somewhere in the house, and that perhaps only Otto Larchney himself could reveal the hiding place of the famous stolen masterpiece.

Peter took it for granted that Larchney, the moment he read that note, would act in a perfectly natural manner. And that meant that he would rush to see whether the painting had disappeared.

Crawling from behind the racks of clothes, Peter went silently to the door of the dressing room, which was standing part way open. He could look into the bedchamber. He saw Larchney discover the sheet of paper, saw him read the message.

For a moment Larchney stood as though turned to stone. Then he picked up the bit of paper and read the message again. A look of fear came into his face.

That piece of paper acknowledged to the world, of course, that there had been an intruder in the house, despite the fact that a search had failed to reveal his whereabouts. But Peter Selbon had judged that Larchney would not cry an alarm immediately. Larchney did not want the world to know that he had in his possession a stolen object of art.

The first moment of horror over, Otto Larchney uttered an exclamation and reached for the bath robe he had just discarded. He slipped into it quickly and put on his slippers again. Then he left the bedchamber and hurried into the little parlor in front.

Larchney made sure that the hall door was locked. Hurrying to one corner of the parlor, he stood for a moment looking around the room, and then he touched a button hidden in the wall. Above his head a section of the wall slipped back noiselessly. There was revealed a painting in a frame.

The millionaire sighed and quickly snapped off the lights in the room. There was a moment of darkness, then another soft snap, and suddenly the picture was bathed in a pink glow.

The famous "Crimson Sunset" was like a thing of reality. Otto Larchney sucked in his breath sharply as he looked upon it. It was like standing on a high hill and looking into the far distance. Trees in the foreground seemed to be swaying in a gentle breeze. A brook, the color of blood, seemed gurgling over the rocks. One glance at the painting was enough to explain why it was a masterpiece, why it was worth untold wealth, and why such a furore had been caused by its theft.

"Still here—still here," Otto Larchney gasped out.

The sight of it seemed to intoxicate him. For some minutes he remained standing before the painting, looking up at it. And suddenly he seemed to come to himself. That note he had found on the pillow. What did it mean? Who could have written it and placed it there?

Sudden fear came to Otto Larchney now. Quickly he snapped off the pink lights and turned on the regular lights in the parlor. He darted to the corner to touch the hidden button that would cause the panel to slide back into place and hide the purloined painting once more. He was breathing quickly, and his face depicted the fear he felt! That note! Somebody at least knew that the painting was in his possession!

"It is very beautiful, Larchney—very beautiful," said a soft voice behind him

CHAPTER IX.

IN A TRAP.

WITH a little cry of amazement and fear Otto Larchney whirled around to face a man who had a mask on his face and gloves on his hands, and one of those hands holding an automatic pistol in a menacing position.

"Not a sound or a move," the masked man warned in a whisper that seemed to be charged with threats. "This little weapon I hold can send you into the hereafter instantly, Larchney. Trembling in the knees, are you? You'd better sit down!"

There was a chair behind Otto Larchney, and he did as the masked man commanded. Rather, he toppled back into the chair. He felt that his heart had almost ceased to beat. As has been written, Otto Larchney was not noted for his courage, and he had several things to cause him fear now.

The threatening masked man was before him. His ownership of the stolen masterpiece was known. This man had caught him in a corner in his own house, despite the guards inside and out.

"Who—who are you?" Larchney gasped out.

"We'll be nameless for the present, thank you."

"And what—what are you doing here?"

"Looking at a wonderful picture, Larchney," the masked man replied in a whisper. "If you are going to talk, keep that voice of yours down, or we'll let this automatic speak."

"You—you are one of those twins?"

"I haven't said so, Larchney. But I do not mind admitting that I am one of The Avenging Twins. Because it'll do you no good to know it, Larchney. We are alone here. After I am gone you may say that one of the Selbon brothers visited you, but we'll be able to show that we did not."

"I'll call for help!"

"Yes?" Peter asked pleasantly, stepping closer and raising the automatic slightly. "You call for help, Larchney, and the call will be your last!"

"What—what do you want with me?"

"Need you ask that, you scoundrel?" Peter replied. "You, who had a share in wrecking my uncle's fortune and good name! Death would be too good for you, Larchney. But I'm not going to kill you unless it is necessary. Remember that—unless it is necessary. I'll do it, of course, if you make an attempt to have me captured."

"What do you want?" Larchney demanded.

He was a picture of abject fear now; he licked at his dry lips and breathed in gasps. His face was white and his eyes bulging. Peter Selbon sneered behind his mask as he looked down at him. That mask seemed to fascinate Otto Larchney. He could see eyes glittering through the slits in it, glittering ominously. And he saw something else—saw the edge of a fresh cut on the chin at the bottom of the mask. He remembered what the men had told Detective Griff. And so he knew that the masked man before him was Peter Selbon. And now, in time, perhaps he could see Peter Selbon sent to prison.

But it would be only his word against that of Peter Selbon, and the twins, he supposed, would have an excellent alibi prepared. Still, Otto Larchney had some hope. Something might happen that would give them a chance to trap Peter Selbon. Another man might catch sight of him before he left the house. But, in the meantime, what would happen?

Peter Selbon, Larchney knew, was there to rob him, to make him pay. But how?

"What—what are you going to do?" Larchney gasped out.

"What did we say that we were going to do, Larchney? You are one of the six, and so you must pay!"

"I—I have no money in the house, not more than a few hundred dollars."

"We are not ordinary thieves out for profit, Larchney. I do not want money. Had I wanted to take your money I'd have arranged to rob the vault in your office. But you have other things besides money."

"Just what do you mean?"

"Why do you suppose I left that note on your pillow, Larchney? It was a trap, and you walked right into it. I knew you had 'The Crimson Sunset' in your possession, and I knew that it was hidden. That note read as though the painting had been stolen. And you did exactly as I thought you would do; you ran to the painting right away to see whether it was gone. You led me to it, Larchney. You betrayed its hiding place."

"You—you are not going to touch it?" Larchney gasped out. "You are not going to steal that?"

"You stole it, didn't you? Or had it stolen? You bought it from a thief."

"But you couldn't sell it!" Larchney said. "What good would it do you?"

The other shrugged his shoulders.

"I wouldn't want to sell it, Larchney. And I wouldn't destroy such a beautiful thing. But I intend to take it from you!"

"They'd find out you had it!"

"I do not intend to keep the thing. It belongs in a museum in Italy."

"The reward—you are after the reward?" Larchney asked. "I—I'll pay you the amount of the reward if you'll leave the painting to me."

"It's a stiff sum."

"I'll pay it!"

"How much did you give for the painting?" Peter asked.

"Two hundred thousand," Larchney replied. "There was a great risk——"

"How much will you give me to leave the painting here?"

"Twenty thousand."

"You're cheap!"

"A hundred thousand," Larchney said. "I'll give you a hundred thousand, and never say a word about it. I'll arrange it all—hand it to you in currency and negotiable bonds——"

"Think a lot of that old picture, don't you?"

"Yes, yes," the art fiend gasped out. "I'd do anything to keep it. I look at it every evening for an hour or more. It—it is one of the greatest things in my life——"

"And that," said Peter, "is exactly why I am going to take it from you."

"No—no!"

"Lower your voice or I'll put a bullet through you," Peter warned.

Larchney showed sudden fear again, fear for himself as well as for the masterpiece. He staggered to his feet and held out his hands to Peter Selbon imploringly.

"Don't take it from me," he begged.

"Enough of this nonsense, Larchney! Get back to the wall!"

"I'll scream for help! I'll——"

"That's your privilege, if you want to die," Peter told him. "Turn your back, Larchney!"

"What are you going to do?"

"Turn your back!"

Otto Larchney obeyed. Peter thrust him against the wall, took the coil of portière cord from his belt and deftly lashed Otto Larchney's hands behind him. He compelled Larchney to sit down in the chair again and lashed his ankles and legs to the chair. When he had finished Larchney scarcely could move.

And throughout all this the art fiend mouthed meaningless phrases and shook with terror. He seemed on the verge of apoplexy as Peter made a gag from some handkerchiefs he had carried from the dressing room.

"Better take it easy or you'll strangle," Peter told him. "You'll not be hurt if you remain still."

Otto Larchney's attempt to gurgle an answer was choked by the gag.

Peter Selbon stepped back and surveyed his work and decided that it was good. Behind his mask he grinned at Larchney's evident terror. He slipped the automatic back into his pocket and took out a sharp knife. Glancing at Larchney again, he stepped toward the painting.

Peter placed a chair close to the wall and got upon it. A short investigation convinced him that the painting could be cut fram its frame without any damage to the masterpiece. He inserted the point of the knife and commenced to cut.

The ripping of the knife blade through the ancient canvas reached the ears of Otto Larchney. With his own eyes the art fiend beheld the famous old painting being cut away. He struggled in a futile manner against his bonds, choked as he made an attempt to speak. Peter realized that he had done well to bind and gag the man. In his frenzy at the loss of the painting he might have forgotten his terror of the automatic and shrieked for help.

Entirely around the masterpiece Peter cut; then got down from the chair with the canvas in his hands. He rolled it carefully, making as compact a bundle as possible, but careful to do nothing that would crack the masterpiece. Otto Larchney had taken good care of it, and for that much Peter was thankful.

Then he stood before his prisoner and glared at him through the mask. "I've got it, Larchney," he said. "And what are you going to do about it? You can't very well make a howl to the police, for the painting is stolen goods, and you know it. You might be asked, Larchney, how it happened to be in your possession. You know art, and you'd never convince experts that you did not realize the true identity of this work. And you've kept it hidden, you know.

"We are square with you, Larchney. This painting will be returned to the museum in time. Losing it will hurt you more than anything we could have done. Two hundred thousand you paid for it, by your own admission. And you'll not be able to sit before it and gloat again."

Otto Larchney gurgled once more, shook his head, indicated that he wished to speak. Peter put the painting down and unfastened the gag.

"In whispers only," Peter said, as he took the automatic from his pocket again.

"You—you——" Larchney gasped out, scarcely able to form the words. "You leave it here! I—I'll pay!"

"It is beyond price, Larchney. Like my uncle's good name, which you helped ruin."

"I—I'll try to clear your uncle's name."

"No, it is too late now, Larchney. And you couldn't bring him back to life. The painting goes with me. You can hang some chromo behind your secret panel."

"Isn't there any way——"

"None," Peter interrupted.

Larchney's eyes blazed. "Then I'll make you pay if it takes me years," he declared. "I'll spend every dollar I have to hunt you down."

"Your threats make me laugh, Larchney. We aren't through with you, possibly. This may be only the first collection from you. Go right ahead and do your worst. Now I am going to leave you, Larchney, and so I'll just fix that gag again. No use in having you strain your lungs howling for help. And you can sit here and look at the empty frame behind the secret panel."

"I'll see you in prison for this!"

"Don't make me laugh," Peter said.

"The only way you can send me to prison is to have me captured here and now. Do you think I came on a little adventure like this without having everything prepared beforehand?"

Larchney looked at the end of that fresh cut on the chin again.

"I'll get you," he threatened. "Maybe you aren't as clever as you think!"

"Time will tell, Larchney. Sorry that I can't remain and talk to you longer. I like to see you squirm, you scoundrel! But it'll be daylight in a couple of hours or so and I still have work to do. I'll just fix that gag."

Peter stepped forward to attend to it, his eyes glittering through the slits in his mask again. If he had followed the voices of his emotions he probably would have closed his hands around Otto Larchney's throat and choked him, but he fought off the feeling.

But neither did Peter attend to the gag. For there came a sudden knock on the hall door, a loud and imperative knock.

"Mr. Larchney," a man's voice called. "This is Riley, Mr. Larchney. Mr. Griff just telephoned, and I told him about what happened to me. He's on his way here now; says somebody must be in the house. Open the door, Mr. Larchney! Are you awake?"

"Help!" Larchney shrieked in reply, his fear of the automatic gone for the moment. "Help! I'm being robbed!"

The truth of the situation flashed through Peter's mind instantly. Otto Larchney had dared to take the chance. His love for the masterpiece had outweighed his fear of the pistol. He believed, undoubtedly, that he could purchase Riley's silence regarding the possession of the painting if Riley made a capture and saved the masterpiece from Peter. And possibly he thought that Peter would be too busy battling with the guards to punish him for crying out for help.

And Peter's mind worked now faster than ever it had before. For he found himself in a trap. Here he was in Larchney's private suite, with Detective Riley and at least one other man in the hall. And there were other servants in the house and more guards stationed outside!

To be concluded in next week's issue of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE.

CONVICTS PRESENT JAILER WITH SAWS

ONE of the most unusual Christmas presents ever given to a jailer was that presented to C. A. Patton in the county jail of Los Angeles, California. The holiday spirit is credited with having turned the intentions of ten prisoners from their attempted jailbreak to one of loyalty and good faith in the jailer. As evidence of their change of heart the prisoners filled a "gift stocking" with fifteen hack saws and handles and gave it to Patton. Then they showed him where rivets had been cut from bars in preparation for an escape, and even confided to him the details of their daring plan to break jail. "Little Mac," awaiting trial for robbery, was spokesman for the prisoners, all of whom were housed in tank No. 9. One of the men had made a jumping-jack Santa Claus from the back of a chair, and this was attached to the "gift stocking" by way of a Christmas card. Pinned to the figure was the following note:

"As a true observance of the proper Christmas spirit we herewith present our compliments because of the kindness that has been shown us in the past—the Men in Tank No. 9."

On His Thirtieth Birthday

by Oscar Schisgall

Author of "A Visitor from Paris," "Tied in the Tenth," etc.

CHAPTER IX.

BEFORE THE ALTAR.

ON his way to church that evening in March, Amos Hobart had been troubled by many disturbing thoughts. As he shuffled along the street, round-shouldered and pensive, he mused on the manner in which he had been drawn into a series of circumstances over which, seemingly, he exercised no control.

He remembered the haughty homecoming of Rose Chester that morning. She had returned from Doctor Emery's with a tale of that gentleman's nobility of soul and uprightness of character. The idea of any one's suspecting him of connection with the Hanover murder! Preposterous and unforgivable!

The good woman had severely reproved Amos. That he should have taken the word of a nincompoop in preference to his own common sense, his own knowledge of the doctor, was incredible! He was too weak; that was his trouble. Any one could make him believe anything. Doctor Emery was innocent of any connivance. What if he had known of the existence of the card in the desk? Would *he* stoop to robbery? Was *he* in need of Ben Hanover's few hundred dollars? Bah!

Well, she had performed her duty by visiting the physician and by lowering herself far enough to question that eminent gentleman. She hoped Amos was satisfied.

He was—according to his admission. But within himself he still doubted, though he voiced none of his doubts. There was no use in eliciting another tirade from the indignant Mrs. Chester.

Chastened and quieted by her harangue, he departed. He went slowly, scratching his gray head, as he moved toward the hall rack. There Lillian accosted him and whispered in his ear.

"I know how you feel about it, Amos. I agree, too. I think the doctor knows more than mother is willing to believe."

Discretion prompted the organist to say nothing. The girl added confidentially:

"Call for me to-night, Amos, dear, when you go to church. I want to go along, to talk to you alone, to hear your music. My—my nerves need it. Will you, dear?"

He nodded and went out.

As he trudged along the street that evening, he recalled that promise and somewhat unwillingly acted upon it. He stopped at the Chester home and summoned Lillian. Together they walked slowly to the church, not conversing. Their thoughts were too stirring to be uttered.

Amos preceded the girl through the little door at the back of the church. He did not see the man lounging on the

other side of the street; perhaps Lillian did, but she granted no importance to the fact. Her mind was occupied with other things. She intended to consult Amos on the advisability of her visiting Ranny and trying to make him understand her love and his condition. Later, after the old man's music had calmed him——

She dropped upon a pew at the side of the church and waited, while Amos moved to the organ, his cane feeling a path through the darkness.

And an amazing drama was enacted before her blinking, unbelieving eyes.

A flash of yellow radiance revealed Amos standing beside the organ. He threw his hat and coat and cane on a bench beside his stool, and prepared to open the instrument. The ghastly illumination played on his deeply lined features and cast black shadows around his eyes.

He was about to sit, his fingers already on the keys, when he paused, perfectly still. He listened. From the aisle behind him came the sound of steps. He whirled around and peered into the blackness; the sound was approaching quickly.

"Who's there?" he called.

There was no reply, but into the vague light advanced a tall figure, with a face white and threatening and demoniac.

Amos staggered back against the organ, his lips writhing in an attempt to scream. He raised one hand to hold off the advancing vision, but his wrist was gripped, and the hand was forced down.

"I've come to keep my promise, Amos!"

"Wh-hat promise?" querulously asked the organist, staring in wide-eyed terror at his assailant.

"You know! I told you that if you meddled any more I'd kill you! Well, you meddled."

"I didn't!" cried Amos in high-pitched, hysterical tones. "I didn't! I couldn't help it!"

"I know what you did. You told everything about me to that detective—I know. You told him I was insane, I suppose. You still believe it."

"But you are, Ranny—you are insane! Everybody knows—even Doctor Emery! Ask him—ask any one."

"Keep quiet about Doctor Emery! He knows the truth about me. He never said I was insane—never."

"But, Ranny——"

"Keep quiet, Amos. I promised I'd kill you, and I'll do it. Right here," he laughed mockingly, hoarsely, "right here by your organ, in your church, before your altar! That's where I'll kill you!"

The organist was shaking pitifully. He was gulping and trying desperately to push himself away from the madman, but the organ kept him facing the leering Randolph Burford.

He resorted to pleading.

"Ranny, Ranny, my boy, think—do you know what you're doing? Right here, in the house of God——"

"That doesn't matter," snapped the younger man. "This is my privilege."

"But not in the house of the Lord. You can't flaunt Him."

"Never mind about what I can and can't do. I can do everything. And one of the things I can do is kill you wherever I please."

"Ranny——"

"If you've got any prayers to say, go ahead."

A moan escaped the old man, and he looked up, begging mercy. Suddenly he realized that some one had interfered. He gazed again at Ranny. By the boy's side stood Lillian, her hands pressed to his chest, her eyes staring up into his.

"Ranny," she was murmuring, "please be quiet."

Startled into silence by her unexpected appearance, the insane Randolph

eyed her blankly. He touched her face, closed and opened his eyes, while his thin brows rose to amazed arches.

"Where—where did you come from?" he stammered.

Rapidly Lillian considered a reply. One came to her in the form of an inspiration. She was handling a lunatic who thought himself on intimate terms with Heaven. She wished to sway him; the best way was to play upon Ranny's insanity. And so she said melodramatically, but earnestly:

"I—I think I must have been sent by St. Michael. He doesn't want Amos to die."

Randolph scowled.

"Rot!" he exclaimed.

"It's true, Ranny. You must let Amos live. It is God's will. You cannot disobey."

Impulsively Ranny's fist rose.

"It's not fair!" he cried loudly. He glared up through the blackness, all the distortions of his brain lending force to his crazed plaint. "You're not playing fair with me! I can do anything I want."

Lillian clutched the lapels of his coat.

"Ranny, dear," she whispered in fright, "that't blasphemy."

"It isn't fair—it isn't fair." He stopped suddenly and cruelly eyed the cringing organist. Then he ejaculated in a frenzy of wrath: "It's not in the contract, and I won't abide by it! I won't! I said I'd kill the old fool, and I will!"

He thrust Lillian aside and disregarded her. He stepped to Amos Hobart and gripped the scrawny throat in powerful fingers.

"No shooting, nothing like that," he hissed. "Only my hands. You meddled when I told you not to, Amos. Now you'll pay. You'll pay with that slinking, rotten life of yours!"

His fingers pressed a stab of pain into the organist. The old man gasped, choked, tried to shriek. He might have dropped unconscious, but Lester Carr's representative had not been asleep.

A commanding voice ripped through the darkness.

"Cut that, Burford! Step back!"

Suddenly paralyzed, Ranny stopped, his fingers still clinging to Amos' throat. As though uncertain that he had heard, he waited for the command to be repeated. It was.

"Lift your hands—raise 'em! I've got you covered with a gun. Another move and I shoot!"

"Who—are you?" asked Ranny in a strange, unbelieving whisper. "Who are —you?"

Perhaps he had a fleeting sense of listening to St. Michael; perhaps he imagined for an instant that Lillian's warning of God's displeasure had been correct. At any rate he felt that a force was being exerted over him against which he was powerless.

"Who is it?" he asked once more, loosening his hold on Amos.

"A policeman."

And at that word a rasping shriek tore from Randolph Burford. He glared up at the ceiling, raised his shaking hands high above his head, and screamed:

"You didn't play fair! You didn't play fair!" A few words were choked in his throat, but he gasped again furiously: "You didn't play fair!"

"I'll *have* to lock him up now," quietly said the policeman.

CHAPTER X.

AMOS RECEIVES CALLERS.

A WEEK later Amos Hobart sat propped up in an armchair, pillows billowed behind him, around him, under him. Over his blue-flannel nightgown he wore a bath robe. His hair, though it gave evidence of having been combed earlier in the day, had been disarranged by constant rubbing against the pillows.

Here he sat, holding court. He was an invalid.

Ever since the fingers of Ranny Burford had twined about his throat a week ago, he had been confined to his room in the boarding house. The physical strain had been too severe for old Amos. It had shattered his nervous resistance, left him a broken, hurt man. But no longer was it necessary for him to remain in bed. He could sit comfortably in his chair and receive callers.

He greeted many. Almost every family of the parish sent at least one representative to inquire about the organist's health. It hadn't occurred in many years that Amos Hobart was away from his organ on a Sunday morning —or any evenings. For seven days now the church had slumbered without the music of his melodies.

Every one came—deacons in somber clothes who eyed him gloomily and then suddenly bethought themselves of some jest which they related with whispered gusto in an attempt to cheer the sick man; stout ladies who brought fruits and double chins, and who gossiped endlessly until Amos prayed inwardly that they would depart to cook meals for their waiting husbands; little, abashed girls who arrived with messages of good hope from busy mothers; and the minister who spoke kindly of everything. Mrs. Chester and Lillian came, too; they dropped in daily, but seldom did they speak of Ranny. It was painful. And on the seventh day after the dramatic incident in the church, Lester Carr called upon the invalid.

As dapper and neat as ever, he smiled merrily and caressed his small mustache, as he sat upon Amos' bed. His clothes, though of civilian cut now and sedately blue, carried the same old impression of delightful negligee.

"Well, well! To think we should find you like this, Mr. Hobart! You see, the life of one who tinkers in crime is not as safe as you might imagine."

"I never imagined it safe. In fact I didn't care to have anything to do with it. I was drawn into the affair."

There was no resentment in his tone; merely resigned displeasure.

"Such things happen," commented the detective agreeably.

Amos frowned.

"What's been done with Ranny? Arrested?"

"Oh, yes. We had to lock him up after that attempt on your life. He wasn't safe to trust. We couldn't afford to take chances."

"No; he should have been placed in confinement long ago."

"Perhaps. But we took the liberty of letting him roam—hoping he would roam to the man who was his accomplice that night at Hanover's."

"That liberty almost cost me my life," grumbled the organist.

"I'm sorry for that."

"And what about that accomplice of his—what about that second man? When do you expect to get him?"

"I think I've got him already."

"Hey?" Quizzically Amos peered at the detective; then, understanding, he added: "You mean Doctor Emery?"

"I do."

"But—but—what proof—how can you prove anything——"

"I can't," confessed Carr. "That's it —I can't prove a thing."

"Then what makes you seem so certain about the doctor? Remember it's a serious thing to accuse him. He's a man of importance, a——"

"I'll tell you, Mr. Hobart." The detective crossed his legs, clasped his hands over a lifted knee, and swayed slightly back and forward, as he talked. "Two people knew of that card in Hanover's desk. The thief who tried to get into the safe knew of it because he had pried open the desk cover. Very well. One of these two people, obviously, ought to have some connection with the the case. I investigated the activities of

the safe salesman, James Donohanty. That man has been away from the city or its vicinity for five months. He's in Rochester, and he has been there continually. That leaves Douglas Emery. Again I say very well. What do we know about Emery? These few things: he was Hanover's mental and physical physician; he knew the Hanover house, knew of the little card; he was the physician of Randolph Burford, who is, according to all evidence, one of the men who entered the Hanover home that night; the doctor lied for some reason when I inquired for Burford at his house; he's keeping strangely quiet now. I ask you, Mr. Hobart, can I help holding insistent suspicions against him?"

Amos scratched his head thoughtfully.

"I suppose not," he said and stared at the floor. It was difficult to reconcile himself to the idea that there could be anything reprehensible in the eminent physician's conduct.

"The trouble is," continued Carr, "that I have suspicions only, no facts. I—I'm stuck, to be candid. I'm making no progress."

"You're trying to show Doctor Emery had something to do with——"

"I'm trying to show it only after all signs have shown *me* that he had something to do with Hanover's death. I'm not deliberately attempting to create a case against the man. It's just that I feel—I know—that Emery is hiding something. And I can't learn what it is.

Amos' hand rubbed along the edge of his bath robe. Contemplatingly he said:

"I don't know what you're going to do about it."

"Neither do I—exactly. I've spent hours and hours in questioning young Burford."

"In his cell?"

"Yes; but I can't get a word out of him. He sits perfectly still and refuses to answer any questions. Yet, by the very manner in which he looks at me when I ask what Doctor Emery had to do with Hanover's death, I know that he's keeping a lot back."

"I wonder why."

"I can't say. I've even lured him on with a promise of freedom. He simply won't speak."

Amos stared away through a window. He looked at the walls of the adjoining building, adorned with creeping flowers in pots on window sills; the good housewives were setting their plants out early. He gazed up at the small square of blue sky visible from his position. His lips were puckered, and he was thinking hard.

Lester Carr was pondering, his knee still clasped in his hands.

And presently, after a long silence, Amos Hobart eyed him with a peculiar expression. His brows were lifted, a queer smile hanging uncertainly on his colorless lips.

"Do you know," he murmured, "I've just had a sort of idea—a presentiment, maybe? Something like that, anyway."

"What's that?"

"About Ranny Burford and the doctor and about that strange contract of his."

"What do you mean?" The detective appeared intensely interested.

"It's about Ranny's thirtieth birthday."

"What about it?"

"He'll expect to die, I suppose."

"Well?"

"Well, when the time comes, and he doesn't die, one of two things will happen to him: either he'll become more insane, more violent, or he'll come to his senses."

"That's what we all think, but——"

"Wait. I told you I had an unusual idea. Suppose on his thirtieth birthday we summon Doctor Emery to visit his cell on some pretext. We can say that the boy needs medical attention through-

out so trying a day. Suppose we do that and——"

"What would be the sense of such a step?" To the practical Lester Carr the drawled opinions of the old man were annoying. He liked to hear crisp speeches, concise and pertinent.

"Listen, Mr. Carr—you just listen." Apparently Amos was not to be hurried. The tips of his fingers rubbed his chin. "Something is going to happen on Ranny's birthday, as surely as you and I are sitting here. As I was saying, suppose we manage to keep Doctor Emery with the boy all day. And suppose we listen to what goes on. There's just a possibility that Ranny in nervousness or in violence, or in return of sanity, or *somehow*—will blurt out something that will help. See? He'll be under great emotional strain all day. See what I mean?"

The shrewdness of a quick mind asserted itself. Carr's eyes narrowed, glittered. He dropped his knee from his clasp. His head came forward.

"Say!" he exclaimed. "That's not bad—not bad at all! Of course it will mean a delay of more than a month before any action starts, but it's better than drifting along, as I'm drifting now, without attaining any results. Really, that's not bad at all—no, sir! I think we'll try it!"

Amos experienced a sense of self-satisfaction. To have a detective like Lester Carr adopt a plan submitted by the humble organist was indeed flattering. He smiled.

"It ought to bring results," he said. "Poor Ranny! It's hard to treat him like this—in prison and accused of—of—— What is he accused of anyway—the murder of Ben Hanover?"

Carr shook his head.

"No; I didn't bring that against him yet. I'm holding that back until I can put my hand on his accomplice. Besides, I had a Mrs. Chester call on me—you know her, don't you?—well, she called and pleaded that I say nothing about Ranny's connection with that murder until I felt certain. She wept like a child. Honestly, it hurt to watch the woman. So I promised to hold the charge a while and save the fellow the additional period of disgrace."

"Then why is he locked up? On what charge?"

"He's a lunatic dangerous to the community."

"But no particular charge?"

"Assault on you, of course."

"And that's all?"

"That's all."

A hopeful flush suffused the old man's cheeks. He seemed suddenly vibrant and young, his illness forgotten.

"Then," he cried in triumph, "if Ranny can be made to recover his sanity without being accused of killing Hanover—then he can't be held for anything if I drop my case against him!"

"You needn't worry, Mr. Hobart. If the boy recovers his sanity, he can't be held for anything. An insane man is irresponsible. I'm not worried about him. What worries me now—the only thing that troubles me—is: can we get his accomplice? Can we get the *sane* man who was with Burford when Hanover was shot? If we can, then that sane man can be held on a charge of murder!"

"Even—even if he didn't do the actual shooting? Even if Ranny used the gun?" Awe trembled in Amos' query. The intricacies of the law were mysteries to him; its technicalities were far beyond his comprehension.

Confident in his superior knowledge, Carr said:

"The sane accomplice is guilty, even if he were on the outside of the house, keeping watch! He was an accessory before the—— Well, never mind. You won't understand. But in the eyes of the law Randolph Burford would not be responsible; his accomplice would suffer the guilt of the murder. And

that is why I am so anxious to arrest the accomplice."

Amos sighed.

"I wish you luck," he told Carr. "But you've got mighty flimsy evidence against the doctor. Only guesses so far."

"So far, perhaps, but wait until that birthday."

With this admonition the visitor decided to end the interview. He rose, stretched, amiably shook Amos' hand, and went to the door.

"Hope you feel better soon," he said. "Folks tell me they miss your organ playing in the evenings. You're an institution."

The old man nodded, smiling sadly, whimsically; in tones that strived to quell a note of despair, he mumbled:

"That's right, Mr. Carr, I'm just an institution around here—just Amos Hobart, an institution."

When he was left alone he closed his eyes, his head drooping.

"An institution," he repeated to himself. "Folks used me like that. I work for them. They take me, use me, draw me into their troubles. I'm a sort of handy man who does the work and, when nobody is looking, does his suffering. I try to keep out of things, but folks draw me in. That's because they think I don't mind—haven't feelings like theirs. I'm just an institution."

Again he smiled, with a touch of pain; then he dozed off in his pillowed chair.

CHAPTER XI.

LILLIAN SEES RANNY.

WITHIN another week Randolph Burford was tranferred from a city jail to a city hospital. The change was made at the instigation of Amos Hobart; indirectly, of course, but nevertheless he was responsible for it. He had persuaded Lester Carr to urge the transfer.

His reason had been purely sentimental. It was so much easier to speak to Rose Chester and to Lillian of the "boy in the hospital" than of the "boy in prison." The implication was different.

Since the detective had adopted his plan for awaiting with hope the dramatic time of Ranny's thirtieth birthday, Amos had looked upon himself as a power behind the throne, a type of master mind. He enjoyed the sensation of importance in the world which such a belief roused. He was behind the police; he was the brain; the others were mere members ready to do his bidding.

Oh, it was a delightful feeling.

With the return of his health Amos resumed his evening concerts in the dark church. But, though he gloried in his new importance, there was still something lacking in his music—some vague fire, some romance, some spirit. It seemed different from the melodies he had poured out of himself before the affair of Ranny Burford.

And it seemed different because, as he played, his thoughts strayed to the insane boy languishing in the hospital, and to the girl whose heart ached for the demented Ranny. Vainly he endeavored to assume himself that he had done all of which he was capable to bring happiness to the two; he knew that they were not happy, and so he could not rest in sincere ease.

His Sunday dinners at the Chester home were things of a dead past. Now he ate there every night.

When he arrived he brought comfort to the resigned Mrs. Chester. He smiled a little and jested. He spoke of the beautiful days to come, after the anxiously awaited birthday, when Ranny, stripped of his weird beliefs, would regain his reason; when spring would come with a new meaning; when the unfortunate affair would have been forgotten and banished from the sphere of concerns. Rose Chester placed no faith in his words of cheer, but she

made a few valiant efforts to appear confident. Occasionally a smile, wistful and wan, would cross her worn features, and she tried to retain it. But it was hard, very hard.

At dinner one evening, after they had been eating in silence for a time, Lillian stared across the table at Amos.

"I saw Ranny to-day," she began.

"You see him every day, don't you?" he asked slyly.

"Yes, they're kind to me at the hospital."

"Ranny doesn't drive you away any more, does he?"

"No."

"H'm! An indisputable sign of returning sanity!" Amos spoke in a jocular tone, but Lillian apparently did not appreciate his humor.

"What I wished to tell you," she said in steady monotones, "was that he seems to confide in me a little more openly. He talks more. He isn't so—so reticent."

Eagerly the eyes of Amos widened.

"What does he say?" he asked quickly.

"Nothing significant. He suffers headaches, severe headaches. And he has fantastic dreams at night—dreams in which, he tells me, he converses with St. Michael and demands that his freedom be restored. Mr. Carr offered to let him go free at the price of—information. Ranny won't give it. He thinks it's a trick, and I know it is. That detective tries everything."

"But what else does Ranny confide?" The old organist felt himself on the brink of a new discovery. He listened, fearful that he might miss even one word.

"Nothing much. He thinks St. Michael wasn't fair with him in depriving him of his two months of life. He thinks he's been wronged."

"And what else?"

"Nothing."

He leaned back, disappointed.

"Doesn't he ever say anything about the murder?"

"Not a word."

Annoyance manifested itself in Amos' scowl.

"I don't think you urge him," he complained.

"Of course I don't! Do you think I wish his mind to dwell on horrors? He must forget such things."

A scheme had entered the mind of Amos Hobart; a cunning light gleamed in his eyes, a crafty light. He was no longer afraid to plan. Lester Carr was supporting his ideas.

"Say," he suggested softly, "I'll tell you something, Lillian. You can help the police get the man who's responsible for the death of Ben Hanover."

"I? How could I do anything?"

He tapped a knife on the table to emphasize his words.

"You tell him to confide in you—to tell you everything; how Doctor Emery helped him, what Doctor Emery did. Understand? I don't care how you manage it, but get the information. He'll talk to *you.*"

Her head snapped up, a look of haughtiness on her face.

"See here, Amos, if you think I'm going to take advantage of Ranny's confidence to help that old detective——"

"Nonsense, girl, nonsense. Don't you want to erase the stigma of a murderer from the man who's going to be your husband?"

"The stig——"

"Yes, the stigma. Unless you—and we—can prove that Doctor Emery is guilty of Hanover's death, Ranny will go through life under that stigma." She winced, and Amos leaped upon the ground he had gained. "Even if he recovers, people will remember what he did. They will point him out. Lillian, child, you *must* do it for his sake. You simply must. Talk to him. Make him tell you what happened that night. The

rest Mr. Carr—er—and I—will attend to."

"I thought you were going to wait for Ranny's birthday."

"We are. But that's only a wild chance. You have it in your power to help now. Lillian, for him you must do it—you must."

For some time she hesitated, faltered, argued half-heartedly. But in the end she acquiesced, she would try to learn from Ranny what had taken place on the night of the murder.

Amos gloried in victory. It was not often that his will dominated the will of others. This was a rare occasion, and he enjoyed it thoroughly. When he walked home he felt himself a power.

Lillian visited the insane Randolph the following day, as she had done every day since his confinement in the hospital. She found him seated on his cot, gazing wild-eyed at the wall, his face abnormally pale. He wore a dressing gown over pajamas; the hospital authorities had insisted on that uniform, perhaps as a protection against possible migratory tendencies on his part.

Lillian sat beside him and took his hand.

"How do you feel, dear?" she asked with all the solicitude of her sympathetic being.

He shook his head.

"The same. Pains—pains in my forehead. I don't know why."

"You poor boy!" Her soft hand caressed his, then patted the man's hair. "I'm so sorry."

"Well, it won't last much longer," he bitterly told her. "I'll be thirty in a few weeks. That'll end things."

She was about to protest, but restrained herself. Discretion prompted her not to stimulate his wrath by argument; better to have him quiet, though despondent.

"Are you afraid?" she murmured timorously.

"Afraid? No!" There was a brave ring in his voice. "No, I was never afraid, since I made that bargain. But I expected to have my two months—not to be cheated."

"Ranny, don't you realize——"

"All I realize is that old Amos Hobart—the meddling idiot!—and the police joined to cheat me! It isn't fair! St. Michael shouldn't have allowed it. Oh, I wish I could see that Amos! Nothing could prevent me——"

Her hand covered his mouth.

"Don't, Ranny dear, don't! You mustn't speak like that."

"What does it matter? He cheated me."

She moved close to him, held his arm in her own, and rested her cheek against his shoulder.

"Let's forget Amos," she pleaded softly, alluringly. "Let's think just of —of ourselves."

The phrase was a shadow of the days of love-making. In Ranny it touched a responsive chord; he remembered something vaguely and knew not what it was. She was clinging to him. He trembled under the impulse to throw his arms about her, to kiss her. But he didn't.

Now love had no part in his scheme of life. He had thrown it away. He had no intention of taking it back. He wanted to be hard and cruel, to avail himself as much as possible of the days which still remained to him. He could not forget his contract. Cheated of his freedom to live as he chose, he gripped himself with the firm decision to get as much as he could from his side of the agreement. He had been given the license for cruelty. He would use it! A crazed idea, twisted and reasonless; but it possessed Ranny, and he did not return the girl's endearments.

"Go ahead—speak," he said as brusquely as he could.

"Speak? Of what, dear?"

"I don't care. I've got only a few weeks. Speak of anything."

"Not of ourselves."

"I don't care what you say about you and me."

"It's not about myself I have anything to say. It's about you."

"What?" Immediately suspicion entered his tones.

"Ranny, dear, listen." Earnestly she stared up into his white face, thinking of Amos' advice. "You say you're going to die. You're sure of it. And I'm not disputing. But, Ranny, when you do die, I don't want to remember my Ranny as a—a murderer. Don't you understand, dear? I don't want to think of you as the man who shot another man. Oh, Ranny, don't you see? Can't you see?"

Instinctively he pulled himself away from her. His eyes blazed down into hers with accusing directness.

"What are you driving at, girl?" he demanded.

She felt miserably guilty. The hypocrisy of her attitude overwhelmed her with burning shame. She knew that she was angling for information; it wasn't straightforward, and she had always been straightforward with Ranny. To bear his doubt was harassing. But she recalled old Amos' plea: "For Ranny's sake!" And she plunged back into the battle.

"I'm driving at one thing, dear! I want you to tell me that *you* didn't kill Benjamin Hanover! I want you to tell me it was some one else! Please!"

He jumped up, a flood of scarlet wiping the pallor from his cheeks.

"What do you mean by some one else? What makes you think there was some one else?"

"I know it, Ranny. I feel it. *You* couldn't have shot a man."

A frenzy of anger was beginning to master him.

"That's a lie!" he rasped. "I can kill any one I please!"

"Please, Ranny, don't——"

"Didn't I almost kill that Amos before your eyes? Didn't I? If it hadn't been for that policeman——"

"No! You couldn't have killed him. You would have stopped."

In disgust he turned aside. He mumbled indistinctly for a moment, then glared at her.

"Who told you to ask me that?" he demanded.

"Told me? Why—why——"

"Who was it? That dog of a detective who comes here with a thousand tricks and questions? Was it?"

She answered truthfully.

"No, Ranny. What makes you think of such ridiculous things?"

"You don't care about them yourself, Lillian. Don't try to make me believe that. Somebody told you to question me. Who was it?"

"It's only I who wants to know. Please tell me——"

"Was it Amos Hobart who advised you to question me?" He swept aside her supplication with rough adherence to his suspicions.

Lillian flushed.

"Now, Ranny," she parried.

"Was it Amos Hobart?"

"What makes you think——"

"Was it Amos Hobart?" He almost shouted the question, and he bent over her threateningly.

As she looked fearfully up into his glaring eyes, she found it impossible to lie deliberately. She tried to say something noncommittal, but his deadly earnestness made such an attempt futile.

Guiltily she looked down at the floor.

"It *was* Amos!" Ranny cried in wild triumph. "It was! The old meddler!"

Beseechingly she murmured:

"He did it for your sake, Ranny. He asked me to——"

"Keep quiet, girl!" The moment of triumph was followed by a fit of devastating rage. He shook his finger under her eyes. "You came here as a spy—a spy of the people who are cheating me of my two months! You came to draw

me out! By Heaven, I ought to do to you what I almost did to Amos Hobart! I ought to choke your lying soul out of you! Every word you said to me was a lie! But I'll let you go—yes, I'll let you go. I couldn't kill you. You get out of here. Get out! Get out, understand? And don't come back! I don't want to see that lying face of yours again! You're nothing but a miserable spy. Get out!"

Before his harangue she staggered dizzily out of his room. His fist was shaking behind her as she lurched out into the hall. Dazed, humiliated, shamed, she ran, weeping, out of the hospital. She had failed.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BIRTHDAY.

DURING the weeks preceding the awaited birthday of Randolph Burford, Lester Carr seemed satisfied to do nothing. Perhaps he constantly observed the actions of the insane man and of Doctor Emery, but he gained nothing by his vigilance. The weeks dragged on; the newspapers ceased allotting space to the mystery hovering over the death of Benjamin Hanover; and life in the city flowed on as tranquilly and as turbulently as ever.

Often the detective had visited the lunatic; but all his wiles had not succeeded in prying a word of importance from Ranny. In the end he surrendered and prepared to rest the outcome of the case upon the eventful birthday of Burford.

As for Amos and the Chesters, they, too, could but wait. Neither Lillian nor the organist went to see Ranny after his outburst against the girl who was to have been his wife. To go to him might have meant risking one's life, and Amos Hobart still liked to live. And Lillian—shame, rather than fear, kept her away.

Only Rose Chester saw the boy. She tried to bestow upon him the love of a mother and the kindness of a friend. But both were repulsed rudely. Ranny no longer trusted any one.

At times Doctor Douglas C. Emery called upon the patient professionally. He closeted himself with the demented Ranny, stayed for perhaps an hour, then departed, hopelessly shaking his smoothly combed head.

"He'll worry himself to death by auto-suggestion, if by nothing else," he told hospital attendants. "He honestly believes that he will die before noon on his birthday, the seventeenth day of May. A deplorable case—deplorable."

And so the days followed one another with no visible excitement, but with a tide of nervousness rising in every one concerned with the future of Randolph Burford. Rose Chester became irritable and made hysterical efforts to appear calm. Lillian smiled confidentially, but in the mornings her eyes were swollen, and the usual pink of her delicate complexion gave way to an unnatural pallor. And Amos—Amos played the organ nightly. But it held no fire, no charm; there were sounds, nothing but sounds; he himself shuffled more wearily than ever in his walks, and his shoulders were bent under a pitiful stoop.

But May finally arrived with its cheering warmth, and the buds sprouted on the trees, and Seaview Parkway assumed a young, gala air, and colorful clothes adorned the pews in church on Sunday mornings, and people wore habitual smiles, and fat men sought exercise, and baby carriages cluttered the sidewalks on business streets—and it was May the seventeenth—the thirtieth birthday of Randolph Burford—the day on which he was to complete his agreement with St. Michael.

They were all in the hospital—Amos, Rose, and Lillian Chester, Lester Carr, and two policemen. The detective had arranged matters commendably. Their entire group was admitted softly and

secretly to the empty chamber adjoining Ranny's; empty because it had been emptied for the occasion.

Amos sat on the bed. He leaned forward, resting his chin on his cane. His eyes stared blankly at the floor, his gray hair appeared uncombed. Mrs. Chester occupied a small, straight-backed chair. She did not take off her hat, but sat stiff and expectant, her lips pressed together firmly. Narrowly she watched Amos, but said nothing.

By the window stood Lillian, her hands nervously gathering the curtain and letting it drop. She gazed out, but did not see. Her hat lay on a white table, her coat was thrown beside Amos on the bed.

And Lester Carr, his fingers twining around each other behind his back, packed back and forth. He was scowling, muttering occasionally, but he did not speak to the others.

They were silent and waiting. It was nine o'clock. During the next three hours something might happen. They had been assured that they would hear any disturbances in the adjoining room, provided they maintained strict silence.

But Amos could not heed the instructions for more than half an hour. Impatiently he glanced up at Carr.

"Where's Doctor Emery?" he whispered.

The detective turned to one of the two policemen at the door.

"Did you summon the doctor, Hawkins?" he asked. The officer nodded, and Carr replied to the organist: "I had him called early this morning. Told him he'd have to stay with his patient all day to-day. The hospital required it, or advised it, or something like that. It's all right."

"Then the doctor is with him now?"

"Yes; he'll be there all morning. They're pretty quiet, aren't they? Wonder what's happening."

"We'll know what happened soon enough!" Rose Chester grimly promised. Her tone ended conversation. They waited.

Minutes and hours dragged on with maddening slowness. A hundred times Lester Carr pulled his watch from his pocket, and a hundred times he was asked the same question: "What time is it now?"

Not a sound came from Ranny's room. At last it was a quarter after eleven—three quarters of an hour to the fateful moment. Still there was no sound. Half past eleven, and then it started. They heard a mumble. They heard Ranny's high-pitched and quaking voice. They heard Doctor Emery, deep-toned, confident. But that was all. They could distinguish no words.

As the minutes passed, the mumble grew louder, more hysterical. Ranny's voice rose above the doctor's, drowned it by sheer volume. A hospital attendant opened the door.

"Shall we go in to them?" he queried softly.

"No!" snapped Carr. "No, not yet! Not until twelve o'clock!"

Standing against the wall they all listened. No one dared breathe loudly, much less speak. Frantically they strived to distinguish words. But, with a few unimportant exceptions, they understood nothing. The mumble increased, like the thunder of a volcano about to erupt. It was unnatural, weird, almost inhuman.

His ear pressed to the wall, his hand gripping his cane, Amos Hobart listened and heard the pounding of his heart more than anything else. He was not superstitious; he did not believe Ranny would die; but he was praying silently that the boy might continue to live.

It was a quarter to twelve. Ranny was shouting wildly.

Now they would understand a few of his words. They stood out between passages of meaningless sounds.

"A few minutes more . . . . I'll die,

I'll die! . . . Why should I tell? . . . Of course not! . . . I'll take the whole blame. . . . Can't hold me accountable. Don't be afraid. . . . I won't. . . . No. . . . When I die I'll take the story with me. . . . I won't tell them——"

Amos and Carr exchanged glances. What story was Ranny going to take with him? What did he mean by the promise that he would not tell, that he would assume the blame? They could guess, but it was impossible to feel certain. Again the hospital physician stepped into the door. A small man, with a pointed, gray beard, he stared at the group against the wall.

"We had better go in to them now," he advised. "Can't leave the patient in Doctor Emery's sole care. He—he's violent, I think, according to the noise." He paused uncertainly.

"Just a few minutes more!" begged Carr, motioning for silence. The doctor acquiesced, coming himself to press his ear against the wall. He knew part of the insane man's story, but not all of it.

And suddenly, before any one realized how the last few minutes had passed, it was noon. A factory whistle boomed; a bell in some church tower began to clang. And from the next room rose a terrible scream, a frenzied, chilling shriek, fiendish rather than human. Those by the wall gasped, turned white.

"Come!" cried the hospital physician. "We've got to go in there now! Can't leave Emery with that maniac!"

They crowded out into the hall, pushing one another through the door. Strange sounds were coming from Ranny's chamber—the sounds of blows and stamping and yelling, even screams. And they were not the screams of Ranny.

"He's killing the doctor!" panted Rose Chester, catching Amos' arm with fingers that bit pain into the old man. "He's killing him!"

The physician threw himself against the door of Ranny's chamber and rebounded. He stood trembling, hesitant.

"They're locked in!" he gasped. "The lunatic has locked the door."

With crisp certainty of his actions, Lester Carr spoke to one of the policemen.

"The fire escape, Hawkins. Get in through the window. The doctor here will give you his master key to the bars of the window."

Hawkins departed immediately. In the hall the group waited and listened to the furious sounds. Orderlies and nurses were gathering about them. No one spoke; no one dared speak. A man was being murdered on the other side of that door. Unless Hawkins gained admittance through the fire escape in time——

Lillian and her mother were both clinging to Amos Hobart; they were white and silent and panic-stricken. Their hands held him fiercely.

With his fingers around the knob of Ranny's door, Lester Carr looked down at the floor and listened. He was hearing strange things yelled by the insane man—important things. They were gasped breathlessly, and punctuated by blows and yells and moans from Doctor Emery. Ranny was shouting:

"You liar—you dirty liar! I see it now. You played on my imagination, you liar! I didn't die! There was no bargain, no contract! You fooled me—tried to make me believe it! Oh, they were right! I *was* insane, crazy! But you can't fool me any longer, you devil! You twisted my brain long enough! I'll tell everything now! Shut up, you coward! I'll tell 'em how you shot Hanover! I'll tell 'em! Can't make me keep quiet now! I'll tell 'em—after I've beaten you to death!"

His breath gave way before his efforts. Those in the hall heard stammered syllables.

"Th-there was no—no contract! You twisted my mi-mind, that's wh-what

you did—that's what! T-twisted my mind—you hou-hound! You liar! You de-devil of a beast!"

The sounds of the struggle continued, with the moans becoming fainter. Mrs. Chester, pallid, whispered in Amos' ear:

"He's killed him!"

Unable to speak, Amos shook his head. His lips were trembling. Suddenly came the crash of glass and Hawkins' voice; there was a cry of wrath from Ranny Burford, another struggle—and silence. A queer, startling silence which stunned the auditors outside the door. They eyed each other without speaking.

The key turned, and Ranny's door opened. Officer Hawkins, big and threatening, faced the group. In his hand hung a club.

"Sorry," he said, "I had to hit him over the head. He jumped at me as I came through the window."

"Never mind!" said Lester Carr.

He plunged into the room, followed by the others. Sprawling on the floor was Doctor Douglas C. Emery. He lay motionless, with arms outstretched beyond his head, but he was breathing! By the window Ranny Burford had crumpled in a shapeless heap. From his head a stream of crimson dripped down over the dressing gown. There was a little cry, as Lillian threw herself beside him. And that was all.

A half hour later both men were on hospital cots, receiving frantic attentions. Both were unconscious. Ranny's crisis had passed.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ORGAN SPEAKS AGAIN.

ON the evening of May nineteenth two men walked slowly toward a little, brown church. One of them Amos Hobart, shuffled along with his round shoulders, but in his stride was a sprightliness which had been lacking for many weeks. He wore no coat, and he leaned but lightly on his cane. Beside him went Lester Carr—dapper and happy and well dressed—with an air of becoming negligence.

It was warm this evening, with the welcome warmth which comes on spring evenings. A slight breeze carried the floating odors of new verdure and opening buds. Off in the western sky a roseate flush showed where the sun had sunk. The men were conversing softly.

"Funny," said Amos, as he interrupted himself to wish a passer-by a cheerful good evening, "funny how that happened. You say Doctor Emery had such powerful influence over him?"

"Extraordinarily powerful," replied Carr. The hospital officials told Emery yesterday that they weren't certain he'd live, and so he confessed."

"Well, well!"

"Then to-day, when they informed him that he *would* live—the man could have bitten his tongue off. Oh, he was in terror!"

"But just what was it he confessed? I don't quite understand these medical terms."

Carr laughed. In a friendly clasp he held Amos' arm, as they walked along.

"He told us this: When Randolph Burford was hurt by that fall, he showed symptoms of insanity as soon as he recovered consciousness. But he showed symptoms of that peculiar monomania of his. And Doctor Emery, quite cunningly, took advantage of the fact. He's a psychoanalyist, you know, a student of the brain who has few equals in the city. Well, he practiced a sort of suggestion on Randolph Burford—made the boy the victim of autosuggestion. He told him repeatedly about this contract with St. Michael. Randolph began to tell it to himself, and at last he believed it."

"Well!"

"Sounds spooky, doesn't it? Nevertheless it's true. We have the doctor's confession."

"But what on earth was Doctor Emery's reason for—for——"

"Don't you see? Emery was, beneath his dignity, a clever criminal. We're all potential criminals, I suppose, but we don't all get Emery's opportunity for practicing crime with little personal risk. His idea was to use Burford—to let Burford commit crimes and let himself reap the profits."

"Well, well!" Amos shook his head, marveling.

"He drilled into the boy's head the crazy notion that he, Doctor Emery, was a sort of mouthpiece of St. Michael. He delivered St. Michael's words to Burford. And among those words were instructions never to mention the doctor's name by way of confession. Peculiar that the confession came from the doctor himself, isn't it?"

"Yes, yes—go ahead, please." Amos did not disguise his interest and impatience.

"That's why Burford never said a word about the doctor to any one. He feared it might affect his contract."

"I understand that now. But what gave him this idea of dying on his thirtieth birthday? It's inexplicable."

"No; that was simply chance—and a bad chance for the doctor. That idea was worked out by Burford's brain, crazed and thinking all sorts of queer thoughts. I suppose that it was because his next birthday was to be his thirtieth."

"Of course," agreed Amos. "I see."

"So that's what Doctor Emery—your eminent and esteemed Doctor Douglas C. Emery—did to Randolph Burford." Carr paused impressively.

"Despicable!" ejaculated the old man. He spat out the word, as if glad to hurl it from his mouth. "But what does he say about the Hanover murder?"

"Oh, that?" Carr frowned and stared off to the fading flush in the sky. "That was bad—very bad. It was Randolph's first job. The doctor wanted Hanover's money. There must have been about six thousand dollars in that little safe. Collections, you know. But the doctor was afraid to trust Burford on the first job! The patient had to be taught. And so the eminent Doctor Emery accompanied his tool that first night. He lied to us when he said Burford had left the house without his knowledge. He himself took Burford out. But the young lunatic expressed a desire to come in to see you at church. He saw Lillian Chester go in, you remember, and so he went, too. Emery permitted it rather than risk an argument. Besides, it was too early in the evening for the Hanover affair."

"Now I understand."

"An hour after Burford left you at the church the two men entered Hanover's house. The insane fellow tried the safe after the doctor had got the card for him. Emery stood out in the hall on watch. When Hanover came rushing down the stairs, *it was Emery who shot!* See? Emery! Burford was innocent.

"But they ran away—Randolph by the front door, Emery by the back. The rest we all knew long ago. Burford was kept concealed in the doctor's house."

"Well, well!" gasped Amos. "What an affair—what an affair!"

They walked on in silence. The old man was meditating. He had been drawn into the affair—drawn unwillingly. But, thanks be to Heaven, he had helped in bringing it to a happy culmination.

"Say," he exclaimed, "how about Ranny's head? Did the policeman's club really restore his sanity—really? It sounds too much like a—a—oh, a book, or a moving picture, or something—too good! Did the policeman really ——"

"Oh, no. It was more than the club. The nervous strain of that day, the crazed realization that he was not dying,

that there was no contract, that he had been in a dream—all that added to the blow on the head, and all that cleared his mind. He ought to be out of bed in a few days."

"Thank God!" murmured Amos. He was thinking—visioning a wedding that would some day take place in his church, while he played the organ. Lillian and Ranny—Lillian and Ranny—his own children.

Ah, but the spring air was invigorating! At the church door he and Lester Carr parted. Heartily they shook hands, and the dapper little detective moved away through the growing darkness.

Fifteen minutes later the black, empty church reverberated with the great chords of a Beethoven sonata. Ponderous chords they were, spirited and welling and soul filling. They echoed through the blackness—a blackness by a tiny circle of light falling on dancing hands. And soon the chords died before an onslaught of tinkling, merry notes that laughed along and filled the church with frolicksome joy.

Amos Hobart was again happy.

THE END.

MOTHER SEES SON'S SLAYER EXECUTED

IN the opinion of Mrs. F. Bernhard, who a short time ago witnessed the execution of the man who slayed her son, women should witness hangings in order to save their sons from the gallows. "Mothers would realize the awfulness of it all and, instead of playing bridge and dancing and going to clubs, would give more attention to the rearing of their boys," said Mrs. Bernhard. "This would save many of them from the hangman's noose."

The mother whose son was murdered believes that many cases which result in hangings are traceable directly to improper rearing and improper home environment. She said that children cannot receive that early training which is necessary to their well being when the mother is busy with social duties to the extent that she makes her interests in the home secondary. "The experience was awful," according to Mrs. Bernhard, "but I would not have missed it for anything. It was the only satisfaction I could have—that of seeing the murderer of my little boy paying with his life. However, I don't believe I will ever forget the look on the man's face as the trap was sprung."

In contrast to the experience of Mrs. Bernhard was that of Mrs. Jeff, mother of the slayer who was put to death. Newspaper reporters who talked with her in the undertaking parlor from which her son's funeral was to be held, quoted her as saying: "My son was crazy; the law should not have hanged him. He did not know what he was doing. They should have placed him in an asylum. Since he was a little boy he has had those 'spells.'"

PULLMAN THIEF MAKES BIG HAUL

THE police of Washington were called upon a short time ago to unravel the mystery connected with the disappearance of $62,000 which Louis Fichandler, of No. 56 West One Hundred and Eleventh Street, New York, N. Y., had taken from beneath his pillow in a Pullman train en route to Washington. The money was stolen some time between midnight, when Fichandler boarded the train, and seven o'clock the next morning, when the train arrived in Washington. The car was a through one operated by the Seaboard Air Line, and was filled with passengers bound for the South. The victim of the robbery could give but little information to the police, nor could the porter and Pullman conductor recall having seen any strangers moving about the car. Railroad detectives, assisting the police, are making every effort to run down the theft.

Under the Rays of the Red Star

By Paul Ellsworth Triem

AT ten o'clock Wednesday morning Prosecuting Attorney James Elliott looked up to confront a short, stout, middle-aged man. The newcomer had a round head and a red face adorned with gested affluence, and his manner sug- two bulging gray eyes. His dress suggested exasperation raised to the *n*th power.

"Sir," he cried, "this is an outrage! Lim was the best cook on the Pacific coast. He has been in my employ for ten years and knows exactly how to make my coffee and poach my eggs. And now they have taken him, have dragged him out of my house from under my very nose."

Mr. Elliott began to understand. He remembered the case of Lim Sook.

"Your Chinaman was caught with opium on his person," he interrupted. "It makes no difference whose cook he was. If he had been the only person who could make coffee or poach eggs for the president we should have had to take him just the same."

The stranger's bulging eyes seemed on the point of popping from his head. His face grew purple, and he pointed a thick forefinger at the lawyer.

"You take Lim Sook because you think he has no friends," he said snarlingly. "But how—how——" He stuttered, wagged his jaw impotently, and sat down. Reaching with a convulsive movement into his pocket he produced a cigar which he quickly lighted. He puffed fiercely for a moment, then removed the cigar and gestured more amicably with it.

"Mr. Prosecuting Attorney," he said, "I am a wealthy man, and I was very fond of Lim Sook. Chinks must hit the pipe, and prosecuting officers must send them to prison, I suppose. But in this case I shall certainly insist on your going after the man higher up, the one who sold my cook his dope! I—I——"

Threatened with a recurrence of his former trouble he ceased speaking to puff furiously at his cigar. Apparently as an afterthought he reached into his left-hand inner coat pocket and hauled out another, which he passed over to the attorney.

"I'm a little excitable," he remarked. "Have a cigar, Mr. Attorney. They're the best money can buy, and if you ever suffer from nerves—but you don't! One can see that."

James Elliott had noted with approval the aroma of his visitor's cigar. The first mouthful of smoke confirmed his impression that this man was no piker. He decided to take him into his confidence.

"Yes," he remarked, "we've got to get the fellow that's peddling this dope, but it isn't easy. There are only fifteen men assigned to the enforcement of the Harrison act in this entire district, which comprises nearly six million people. Naturally they can't be everywhere, and the most important detail is watching the ports and the sea coast."

The stranger considered this statement suspiciously.

"Say, look here," he said after a moment. "My name is Nollney—Augustus Nollney. I'm pretty well fixed, and I'm in earnest about this business. Why can't I pay you people——"

The county attorney held up his hand peremptorily. "None of that, my friend," he interrupted. "You don't have to bribe me to do my duty, and neither I nor any other official is allowed to consider a proposition of that kind. But I am going to do something, and I'll start it right now."

He crossed to an inner door, opened it, and spoke to some one in the room beyond.

"Send Mr. Lyons in," he commanded.

The man who entered presently was a thick-set elderly fellow with mottled complexion and slatey-gray eyes. He came across to the prosecuting attorney's desk and stood waiting.

"Mr. Lyons, I want you to meet Mr. Nollney," Elliott said. "Now, Lyons, Mr. Nollney has just come in about that chink, Lim Sook. Lim worked for him. Have you any idea where he got his dope?"

Lyons looked thoughtfully at Mr. Nollney's cigar, and that kindly person immediately handed him one.

"Yes," he said as he lighted the cigar and puffed approvingly at it, "it's a safe bet that it's Argentine Louie who peddles the stuff around here, but you know we haven't been able to get anything worth while on him. We could maybe catch him with some of the stuff, but we want to land him peddling it. No use sending him down for six months when we might be able to hand him ten years."

Elliott explained to Mr. Nollney the technicalities of the narcotic law, then looked again at Lyons. "I guess you'd better lay off everything else and go after Louie," he announced. "You know who some of his local customers are. Sit tight till you catch Louie at one of their houses; then bring him in!"

Three days later Augustus Nollney received good news.

"We got Argentine Louie last night," James Elliott told him. "Lyons will be in to tell you about it in a moment. I've sent for him."

Mr. Nollney's bulging eyes snapped. "That's fine," he declared. "Mr. Attorney, have a cigar. And surely I may do a little something for Lyons—just a little twenty-dollar bill?"

"Not a thing like that," interrupted the attorney brusquely. "Give him a cigar, but no money."

Lyons entered presently. His eyes were bloodshot, and his hands looked puffy and purple. He stuffed into a side pocket all but one of the handful of cigars the enthusiastic Mr. Nollney thrust upon him, lighted the one he had held out, and told briefly of the capture of Argentine Louie.

"I took the chief's advice and began watching the house of a well-known citizen who buys the stuff. Two nights passed and there was nothing doing. Then last night, about eleven o'clock, here comes Louie, pussyfooting it along, and I grabbed him before he could make a break. I found some dope on him and I took him down to the house boat where he lives and tried to make him come through with a confession. But he wouldn't stir a peg in that direction. He only looked at me and said——"

Lyons knocked the ashes off the end of his cigar and looked enjoyably at the glowing end. "Say," he said laughingly, "I've heard lots of good ones in my time, but you got to hand it to Argentine Louie! He sure is the silver-tongued orator. What do you suppose the old devil said to me?"

"Offered you a bribe, I suppose?" Nollney hazarded.

"Nothing like that. He said if I didn't turn him loose I'd be dead within forty-eight hours. Said he's born under a red star, and folks that tries to hurt

him always dies. The rays of that red star get 'em, he said."

Augustus Nollney snorted. "Superstition," he cried. "Piffle—fairy stories!"

"Sure," agreed Lyons. "I told Louie that if I lived till the rays of his red star got me I'd be here when Gabriel blew his horn."

Mr. Nollney left soon after, highly gratified at the turn events had taken. He promised to call at the prosecuting attorney's office next morning, and they saw him go puffing off down the corridor leaving behind him a fog like a tractor.

"Not a bad old cock," Lyons commented. "Well, chief, I got to finish looking over Louie's place, but I'll be back here before you close up this evening. So long!"

At five o'clock Jim Elliott crossed to the inner door and spoke to the clerk. "Tell Lyons I'd like to see him for a minute," he commanded.

"I don't think he's come in, sir," the clerk answered. "In fact I'm sure he hasn't. There is no one in his office."

The county attorney crossed the inner office. Lyons' little cubby hole opened off the farther side, but there was no sign of the operative there except an extra rain coat and felt hat, hanging against the wall. Elliott stood thinking.

"I'll go around by the canal and take a look at Argentine Louie's place," he told the clerk. "If Lyons comes in tell him to phone me at the house some time after seven."

Ten minutes later he had passed through the outskirts of the little town and was approaching the canal. Dusk was falling and out toward the bay a mist rose slowly.

Jim Elliott left his car in the almost unused road which flanked the canal and struck out along a walk formed of a single width of plank raised on trestles.

As he approached the platform built in front of Louie's ark, he noticed there was no light at the single window, and he imagined Lyons had completed his work and gone home. The door was unlocked, and he opened it and stepped inside. Probably there would be a lamp or lantern——

He struck a match and for a moment stood holding it high before him. Then a sudden exclamation escaped his lips, and he dropped the match. Hastily lighting another he stretched it up and fumbled at the wick of a lantern suspended from the roof of the ark. The wick sputtered, then caught; and the yellow flicker of the lantern partially lighted the room.

The newcomer took another step forward. At a table built against the farther wall a man was sitting, his body dropping forward, his head on his arms. Elliott forced himself to turn the face toward the light. It was the face of Lyons, the operative; it was livid, and the eyes were half closed. Lyons was dead.

Jim Elliott had been prosecuting attorney for two terms, and his nerves were pretty steady; he forced himself to go methodically about the business before him. He stood for a time looking around the single room of the ark, then ran his hands over the dead man's body for the tell-tale moisture of blood. Nothing. Stooping, he sniffed at the swollen lips. He noticed nothing but the scent of tobacco. Of course that would cover the odor of some of the poisons which usually are detected by their fumes, but the conviction was growing upon Elliott that his assistant had not died by poisoning.

"Lyons told me he tried to take out some insurance a while back, and they turned him down on account of his heart," he recalled. "He's been working pretty hard here lately, and he must have had a sinking spell of some kind here all by himself. Yes, that must have been it!" But somehow the explanation

didn't entirely convince him. He took a final look around, extinguished the light, and returned to his car.

Within twenty minutes the sheriff and coroner were on the ground. Augustus Nollney turned faint when he heard of Lyons' death. He seemed to have taken a fancy to Lyons; and, moreover, there was the coincidence of the operative's having died so soon after the mysterious threat of Argentine Louie.

"Look here, Mr. Attorney," he snapped out, "are you sure there wasn't some sort of trap set in that house boat? Some sort of trap gun."

"Which killed without leaving a wound?" Jim Elliott interrupted. "No, the coroner has made a thorough examination, and unless the chemical analysis of the stomach contents shows that he was poisoned we'll have to conclude that Lyons died from natural causes."

"And there's no chance that this man, this dope vendor, could have gotten out of jail and done something and then gotten back?"

The attorney smiled. "Not a chance," he said. "But I'm going over to visit our mutual friend, and you can come along if you want to."

Mr. Nollney hesitated for a moment. Then he lighted a fresh cigar, handed one to his companion, and nodded. "Nothing like good tobacco to steady your nerves," he said.

Argentine Louie was in one of the cells in the front corridor of the jail. The sheriff unlocked the outer door and conducted his visitors into the presence of the narcotic vendor.

Louie was lying on his bunk, formed of a strip of canvas hooked into the steel framework at each end of the cell. He lay with his back to the cell door, but at the sound of grating bars he rolled over. A huge old man he was, with a great hooked nose and eyes as black as midnight. He swung his long legs to the floor and sat up, blinking slowly at them like a condor. The county attorney wasted no time in getting down to business. "My friend," said he, "at the time of your arrest you made a threat with reference to the man who caught you. Now he is dead. He died in your house. What have you to say?"

Argentine Louie shook his great head slowly. "I made no threat," he mumbled. "But—I told what I saw. I was born under a red star. And I see——"

He broke off and they saw his lids droop and his eyeballs roll up till nothing but a crescent of white showed. He mumbled unintelligibly, then spoke aloud in a sonorous voice.

"I see the man who stands beside the door—the rays of the red star shine fully upon him—he is stricken—he is down. Yes, he will be the next to go!"

Involuntarily the sheriff and the prosecuting attorney looked at Augustus Nollney who was standing beside the door. Nollney grimaced and lit a fresh cigar.

"Bunk!" he quavered. "Nonsense! He's trying to scare me!"

At four o'clock that evening the county attorney hauled the phone across his desk and spoke into it.

"Yes, this is Elliott—what's that—Mr. Nollney you say? The doctor is there? Good heavens! I'll be right out."

He jerked on a tweed cap and ran from his office. Racing to his machine he climbed in and was off. He broke all the traffic laws by shooting at fifty miles an hour up the left side of the street and parking in front of a fire hydrant.

Doctor Martin was just coming down the steps of the pretentious house recently leased by Augustus Nollney. He looked grave.

"I think he's going to pull through. He was a mighty sick man for a time. No, I can't tell you what it was. Possibly a touch of mushroom poisoning,

although the servants say he hasn't eaten anything of the kind. I think he'll be able to see you."

Jim Elliott looked with awe upon the ashen face of the master of the house. Nollney looked like a dish rag. His fingers plucked at the coverlets.

"It came on me like a shot," he whispered. "No, I hadn't had a bite of anything for four hours before this thing hit me!"

His fingers grew still and he stared up at the county attorney. "What the devil is wrong?" he added next moment. "I'm beginning to believe in witchcraft!"

Elliott nodded. "I'm going to phone narcotic headquarters and have them send down every available man," he replied. "We're going to get to the bottom of this affair!"

The following morning Elliott found two men awaiting him at his office. One was a tall, strongly-built young fellow with a hawk's nose and eyes like the tips of a pair of steel drills. This was Charlie Cooper, from narcotic headquarters. The other was a shabby little person whom Elliott had been wanting to see ever since this affair started. Doctor Isadore Keeler wasn't much of a success as a practicing physician because he lacked that magnetism which alone will enable a modern doctor to build up a clientele; but in dealing with certain aspects of crime he was very expert.

The prosecuting attorney introduced the two men. Young Cooper surveyed the diminutive physician almost superciliously, then turned to Elliott and began a rapid fire of questions. What about the inquest? Any bruises or wounds on the body? How about the analysis of the stomach contents?

"Purely negative," Elliott replied to the last question. "Except for attendant circumstances, the death of Lyons would seem to have been due to natural causes, chief among which was an acute dilation of the heart. But after the sudden illness of this other man, Nollney—why, here is Nollney himself," he added. "Glad to see you, sir. Didn't imagine you'd be in shape to come down to-day."

Mr. Nollney was puffing vigorously at one of his eternal cigars, so that he looked like a mechanical manikin driven by steam power. He was introduced to Cooper and Keeler, to both of whom he passed out his habitual donations.

"I was pretty wobbly," he admitted. "I've just had an overhauling at the doctor's, and he tells me my heart is none too good. Sound enough organically, but must have been strained by this business——" He broke off to stare moodily from one to another of the three men. Then he shook his head.

Cooper put Mr. Nollney through a rigorous examination as to his actions before the sudden onset of his sickness the previous day. Nollney went over the details patiently.

A few minutes later the four adjourned to the jail where the narcotic sleuth proceeded to question Argentine Louie. The old man regarded Cooper sluggishly, but presently he blinked his eyes and sat with his head tipped forward upon his chest. Under drooping lids they saw the glistening white of his eyeballs.

"I see two men standing in the rays of the red star," he droned. "One of them is tall, with a crooked nose and a scar across the back of his right hand. He will be struck down within twenty-four hours. The other—the other——"

Charlie Cooper, who was tall, had a Roman nose and a scar across his right hand, tried to look contemptuous. The corners of his mouth twitched, and he took a threatening step toward the old man.

"The other stands near me now. He is bald, and he wears a pearl tie pin. I see him under the light of the red star——"

Prosecuting Attorney Elliott, thus

singled out, glanced almost pleadingly at Isadore Keeler. The little physician was blinking.

"The red star," he muttered to himself. "The light of the red star——"

He looked ponderingly at James Elliott, and from him to Mr. Nollney who stood back in the jail corridor puffing nervously at a cigar. Doctor Keeler seemed to be trying to fit a number of detached fragments together into a pattern.

Seven o'clock that evening found Charlie Cooper, the man from narcotic headuarters, seated at a pine desk in a basement room at the court house. He had phoned the city for a bunch of reports on the activities and methods of all the better-known narcotic vendors in this part of the country; and now, as he puffed at one of Augustus Nollney's excellent cigars he examined these reports with pondering attention. Any little twist or detail might give him the idea he wanted.

In addition to securing these reports Cooper had sent in a call for every available man in the department. The chief, sitting at the other end of the long distance telephone, had agreed that even the watch kept recently on certain bays and inlets along the coast was not as important as the matter of solving the mystery of Lyon's death and Nollney's sickness, and the best men in the service had been called in to assist.

The drop light over the desk was suspended by a long cord. Cooper stood up to adjust this. His eyes were bothering him, and he rubbed his hand back and forth across them. Probably he had been smoking too much.

He sat down and bent again over the reports. The type was blurred, or was it his vision? He looked up with a start; the room was whirling. Then a stabbing pain seemed to go through his chest, and his heart felt as if it were being wrenched into bits. He staggered to his feet, raised both hands to his throat, and fell forward across his desk.

Fifteen minutes later James Elliott walked briskly along a corridor toward the lighted doorway of Cooper's improvised office. Evidently the detective was still at work. Then Elliott reached the door and for an instant stood blinking in the light. Next moment he cried out and leaped across to the desk. What he saw was startling.

Cooper's breathing was so shallow that at first the attorney thought it had ceased. A dusky flush lay over his face, his jaws were tight shut, and his hands were clenched. After one glance Elliott rushed up to his own office and presently had Isadore Keeler on the phone.

Doctor Keeler was usually a rather diffident and insignificant-looking little man, but, at times like the present, he had the manners of a general. He examined Cooper, sniffed at his lips, and ordered Elliott to phone for an ambulance.

"It's too soon to tell whether or not he's going to pull through, but I think he will," the physician commented. "By the way, Elliott, have you been feeling all right?"

"Never felt better," his friend assured him. "I had an idea I'd been smoking too much, and that that was making me kind of nervous. Nollney with his everlasting Havanas——"

"You might phone Mr. Nollney to come down here while you're about it," Keeler interrupted. "Just tell him about Cooper."

By the time Augustus Nollney came puffing into the county attorney's office, whither Elliott and Doctor Keeler had adjourned, Cooper had been removed to the emergency hospital. Now the physician and the lawyer sat facing the door, and a third chair had been placed for the newcomer.

"Well, well," gasped out Mr. Nollney, "so Cooper is down! Really, this thing is getting on my nerves, gentle-

men. It makes one believe in witchcraft and black magic!"

Isadore Keeler nodded vaguely. "I am far from certain that such old-folk beliefs are without foundation," he agreed. "But in the present case it is just possible there is a more natural line of explanation. I thought we might try to find it among us."

He paused and looked almost apologetically at the visitor. Augustus Nollney returned the look. His eyes were alert, but he said nothing. Almost mechanically, it seemed, he reached into an inner pocket and drew out a cigar wrapped in foil. He removed the covering, bit off the end of the cigar, and sat with it in his fingers.

"All right," he said impatiently. "Let's go!"

"Let's begin with a surmise," acquiesced the physician. "Let us suppose we are engaged in the narcotic business, and that we want to bring in a big shipment of contraband. The Federal government is on the job, and they know as well as we what we're up to. They may even have spotted the place where we've arranged to have our big shipment landed. Now, how can we effect a landing?"

Doctor Keeler paused to stare from one to another of his companions.

"By airplane?" hazarded the county attorney.

Augustus Nollney merely stared. Once he drew a match from his pocket and seemed on the point of lighting his cigar. Then he paused to listen.

"No," said Keeler, "not by airplane. That's old stuff. But here is another idea. Suppose that we can divert the attention of the narcotic squad? Suppose that we can give them something so spectacular to think about, something so mystifying and challenging that in self-defense they will be forced to divert all their resources to dealing with it? We would have to plan this coup in advance. It would take two clever men, acting together. We would have one of them take the initiative by causing the arrest of the other——"

Deliberately Augustus Nollney raised his cigar to his lips and struck a match. Before he could apply the little spurt of flame, however, Doctor Keeler was upon him and the two were rolling on the floor. The specially prepared cigar which Nollney had carried wrapped in foil for such an emergency—the cigar, a dozen whiffs of whose drugged smoke would have placed him forever beyond the jurisdiction of human laws and law courts, rolled away from the pair.

There came the sound of feet from the hall, and the sheriff and a brawny deputy rushed in from where they had been stationed by Keeler. A moment later Augustus Nollney, master mind of the narcotic runners, was lying on his back, securely handcuffed.

Doctor Isadore Keeler was speaking affably. "Of course there was nothing particularly novel in the use of the drugged cigars," he remarked. "The ones he had in his left inner pocket were perfectly harmless. In his right he had some that were doped to knock a man out, but they weren't supposed to kill him. Lyons proved unusually susceptible, because of his heart trouble. I imagine both Argentine Louie and our friend, Nollney, were surprised and a little worried by his death. That special cigar, wrapped in tin foil which Nollney was about to light when we grabbed him, probably has enough of the stuff in it to kill a horse. I imagine we will find a volatile poison, capable of being released by the heat of the burning tobacco, and so drawn directly into contact with the mucous membranes; but it may be that the poison is simply a soluble one, concealed in the stub end so that it will be dissolved by the saliva."

The county attorney shook his head dubiously. "But Nollney's own sickness?" he objected.

"That, I admit, was a stroke of genius. It followed up the policy which led Nollney to take the initiative in the whole affair—it was he who started the investigation that led to the arrest of Argentine Louie, you know. This was a big deal, and they had to scramble a few eggs to make their omelet. Louie's stake must have been a tremendous one. Well, Nollney conceived the idea of diverting the narcotic people by starting this business down here; and he added the fine detail of selecting himself as one of his own victims. That furnished convincing evidence of his innocence, if any one had chanced to suspect him. But a plug of tobacco, held under his armpit for a short time, would bring on all his symptoms and leave him unharmed afterward!"

The little physician paused to wave a stubby forefinger in what he evidently imagined was a forensic manner. "Of course I was gambling a little when I figured this out, early this evening. I phoned young Cooper's chief in the city and told him not to call in his guard; told him we had the situation in hand down here. Then I sprang my little oration on Nollney, and he saw he was hooked. The fact that a drug-running launch has been captured down the coast seems to complete our case. But if these two birds hadn't resorted to metaphors, poetical stuff, I'd never have tumbled in time. That 'red star' idea was all right in a way, but it started me to looking around *for* a red star. And I knew I'd found it when I chanced to notice the glowing end of one of Nollney's eternal Havanas. That set me to thinking, and eventually I figured out how Louie, with his prophesies, and Nollney, with his drugged smokes, had been able to pull off a pretty slick display of team work!"

CAN A HINDU FAKIR HYPNOTIZE A CROWD

THE very interesting question has been asked, can a Hindu fakir hypnotize a street crowd on a moment's notice? Can he make them see what he wants to make them see? The question probably arose out of a desire to explain by hypnotism some of the extraordinary tricks these men are able to perform. The explanation of crowd hypnotism cannot stand. The same question applies to a group of people in a room, whom a criminal wishes to hypnotize for some sinister purpose.

The answer in both cases is decisive—he cannot do it. The reason is this: A group of people cannot be hypnotized in that length of time unless, first, they understand the laws of hypnosis; second, they must know that they are going to be hypnotized; and third, they must do almost as much for themselves to reach this cataleptic state as the hypnotizer does for them.

"Any intelligent person can be hypnotized. Every intelligent person is susceptible to hypnotic influence, provided he understands the laws of hypnotism."

No person is at any time absolutely subject to another's will unless he wishes to be, notwithstanding court excuses for crime to the contrary. The mentally deficient, of course, do not come under this rule. Under hypnotism a person will not do things which he is not accustomed to do in ordinary daily life.

For instance, you cannot make a person steal unless he is naturally a thief and dishonest. You cannot put a subject to sleep for three days unless he knows enough about the laws of hypnotism to be susceptible to the suggestion of a three-day sleep. 5,000 people gathered together in a hall could be hypnotized in two minutes if they knew enough to make themselves subject. The same number, or any part of them, could not be hypnotized in ten years if they knew absolutely nothing about hypnotism.

Brethren of the Shadows

by John Hunter

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

A NOTORIOUS band of jewel thieves, calling themselves the Brethren of the Shadows, have made a pact to disband and divide their spoils. One half of the loot is distributed in even shares at once. The other half is left with Hector Cunningham, one of the Brethren, under a compact whereby it is to be kept intact until all but one of the band are dead, the survivor to have the entire remaining spoils. At the time of the opening of the story, the Brethren have been disbanded for ten years, their last exploit involving the murder of McElvey, the banker, and another man, Carlotti. There are only three survivors, Hector Cunningham, his friend Bartholomew, and Len Sarson, who has been wandering abroad for eight years and puts in an appearance at Wickham, where Cunningham has his home, on the day following Cunningham's receipt of a warning message from the Gray Wolf, a criminal, who is in the habit of warning his victims before robbing them.

Tess Cunningham, Hector Cunningham's niece, after saying good night to her sweetheart, Dick Langley, a few days after the Gray Wolf's attempt on the jewels, visits her uncle's room and finds him dead, a knife in his back, the jewels gone, and the Gray Wolf's emblem, a small, metal image of a coursing wolf lying close at hand.

There are now only two surviving members of the Brethren of the Shadows, Bartholomew and Sarson. The latter visits the former at his home in Chicago and accuses him of the murder of his old friend, Cunningham, and the theft of the jewels. Bartholomew admits having the jewels, but denies the slaying. While they are arguing, the Gray Wolf, who has entered the house by stealth, obtains possession of the jewels and escapes. He has previously informed Bartholomew that he is out for revenge against all members of the Brethren.

Declaring that the Gray Wolf is at Wickham, Bartholomew goes to Tess Cunningham's house for a visit and finds Dick Langley there, also Cartwright and his fiancée, Nell Remington, casual friends of the murdered man's niece. During his visit, Mr. Bartholomew learns that detectives have identified the slayer of Hector Cunningham with the slayer of the banker, McElvey, ten years previously, by means of finger-print clews. Tess has discovered that her guest Cartwright is a famous detective named Jack Benson, who is on the trail of the Gray Wolf, and that the girl Nell Remington is actually his wife, Christine Blair. She also observes that some one has removed the door handle of Mr. Bartholomew's room, and suspects that it is for the purpose of getting his finger prints. The conduct of her fiancé, Dick Langley, also puzzles her and she suspects him of some connection with the Gray Wolf.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

TESS ASKS DICK.

IN her agitation, Tess got to her feet and walked to the window. She felt that she could not sit quietly and face the astounding discovery that had just come to her. Cartwright—Dick's friend—was Benson, the detective, the man on the trail of the Gray Wolf—also Dick's friend! She repeated that, as though it were of the greatest significance of all.

She was suddenly aware of a great nervousness, growing rapidly to something akin to terror. Very definitely now, in the fog of all this stumbling, she began to see the path she was treading, and the goal to which it was leading her. She must know the full truth! She could no longer endure this vast uncertainty, this grasping of little bits of information, on which she built her flimsy structures of deduction.

She turned from the window, and her eyes rested on the safe. Her uncle's list of the jewels was in there, the list which detailed with such alarming accuracy the loot the Gray Wolf declared had been in the possession of the Brethren of the Shadows. It might be

as well if she took it with her, for she had resolved to probe to the heart of the matter without further delay.

She opened the safe, and the first thing she saw was her uncle's photograph, lying face upward, as Mr. Bartholomew had left it when he so hurriedly closed the safe on the previous night.

Tess picked it up and examined it curiously. Who had placed it there, and why, she had not the faintest idea, yet the discovery, far from shocking or disturbing her, left her cold. She felt that she was steeled to the unusual, and could now view unmoved the most extraordinary incidents.

It was as she put the picture on the table that she connected it with the list, and realized that she was not so indifferent as she imagined. If the safe had been opened, as it must have been for the photograph to be placed inside it, there was only one reason why it should be opened—at least, so she thought—and that was because it contained the list. Its other contents were old books and a number of papers of absolutely no value to anybody except herself.

Hurriedly she dragged out the books, and with the last one removed, saw the secret cavity open and the little image of a gray wolf inside it. The sight of the thing sickened her. These little effigies must forever be associated in her mind with tragedy and the ways of darkness. They stood symbolic of mystery and inscrutable workings toward inscrutable ends, and the fact seemed to give them some effortless type of life.

Tess reached out her hand and picked the thing up, handling it gingerly, turning it over and over, finding it cheap and insignificant of itself, but possessed of a fascination exceeding that of precious stones.

The girl steadied her thoughts, and considered again the resolves she had made before she discovered the loss of the list. She had decided to see Dick, and this discovery of the gray wolf in the safe shook her decision, frightened her from pursuing it. Yet she was aware that she could no longer sustain the uncertainty of all these deductions, or endure the horrid doubt which was rapidly filling her days and nights. She strove to view the whole thing calmly and in a detached fashion, but failed.

Then she acted precipitately, as though she wished to give her doubts no time to gain the ascendancy. She rang the bell, and said to the maid who answered:

"Will you find Mr. Langley, and ask him privately to come up here and see me. Tell him it is extremely urgent."

The servant went, and Tess waited by the window.

In a little while Dick came, hurrying in at the door with some alarm on his face.

"Tess! What's——" His eyes rested on the safe, and he stared from it to her. "There hasn't been another!"

Tess walked across the room and closed the door carefully, then indicated a chair by the table.

"Will you sit down, Dick?" she said quietly. "I want to have a serious talk with you."

She had the gray wolf held tightly in her hand, where he could not see it.

CHAPTER XXIX.

DENIAL.

DICK seated himself, and his eyes never left Tess' face. She drew a chair to the opposite side of the table, so that they faced each other across the polished surface.

Before Tess could start, Dick said: "By the way, Tess, I'd like to mention that Cartwright's been looking for you. He's had to run up to Chicago, and he asked to be excused. He'll be back this evening or to-morrow morning. I told

him it would be all right. He's gone now. Nell has gone into Morganburg with him in the car. He makes better train connection there; and she's going to drive it back from the station."

"I see."

Tess thought swiftly. Cartwright—Jack Benson—was taking the doorknob to Chicago, where it could be examined by finger-print experts and compared with the records they had of the markings on McElvey's table and those on a figure of the gray wolf found beside her uncle. That comparison might mean the arrest of somebody, of Mr. Bartholomew!

Nell Remington had gone with her husband so that, on the way to the Morganburg station, they could discuss the whole matter without fear of being overheard. They were a clever couple, Tess thought, but their ways were hardly those of a professional detective.

"Mr. Bartholomew is about, I suppose?" she said to Dick.

Dick nodded. "He's gone for a walk. He'll be in for lunch all right."

Tess did not know that Mr. Bartholomew had gone to look for Sarson, in the very confident knowledge that he would find him.

"So we have the house to ourselves?" she said to Dick, and looked straight into his eyes.

"Yes, dear. But I say what's——"

"Wait a minute, Dick. I want to explain certain things before you say anything, if you don't mind. It's dreadfully serious, both for you and for me."

Her voice dropped slightly, for, with this meeting, she was realizing more and more what the outcome of it might mean to her.

"There have been all sorts of things happening, Dick," she began, "since Uncle Hector—died."

"Yes." Dick was very steady and cool, watchful, she thought.

"Some of those things have come to my notice, and they have made me think a lot—such a lot that, up to the present, I have been afraid to speak to you of them."

"To me! But why, dear?"

Dick's obvious incredulity shook her convictions. He was either perfectly innocent or a wonderful actor. She forgot that if he was what she thought him, he must be a wonderful actor.

"To begin with," she continued. "There was the car that night. You remember we used it one morning and it was dirty, and I said it had been cleaned. Well, it *had* been cleaned, Dick. I made a point of asking Watson about it, and he assured me that he had cleaned it. And Watson is a very honest, straightforward man. So somebody used the car during the night without my knowledge, somebody who could get at it easily and bring it back without any questions being asked. Also, I thought, during the night, that I heard it go down the drive."

"Did you?" Dick was sitting back in his chair with his arms folded, looking very much at his ease, and at the same time extremely interested in the story he was hearing.

Tess made straight for the next and more dramatic point in her recital.

"You remember the motor smash I had while out with Mr. Cartwright?"

"Yes."

"Although I haven't told him, when his wallet dropped from his pocket, some things fell out of it."

Dick did not change in expression or attitude; yet Tess thought that his eyes revealed the slightest hint of strain. She leaned forward a little, still holding the gray wolf tightly in her hand.

"Those things, Dick, were gray wolves, like those used by the criminal who calls himself the Gray Wolf!"

Dick whistled softly. "I say, Tess! Is that so? But it's absurd. I know Cartwright. He's as straight as a die. And Nell—I mean to say. He'll get engaged to her."

It was well done, and Tess knew that she could never get past it. It was impossible for her to accuse Dick of lying, impossible for her to ask him straight out if he were the Gray Wolf, for if he were not, she would never be able to forgive herself for her suspicions of him, and might not expect forgiveness from him.

"I am not so sure of Nell," she added. "Do you know that she is remarkably like a woman who was called Christine Blair, and is now the wife of Jack Benson, the detective?"

Dick laughed quietly. "I say, Tess. You're getting all mixed up, you know. What are you trying to do? Be a detective yourself?"

Tess shook her head. "No. I have merely discovered all these things by accident, and I should be less than a fool if I failed to attach some significance to them, shouldn't I?"

"Perhaps so," Dick conceded. He was quite undisturbed. "But why didn't you tell me all this before? And how do you know that Nell Remington is like this other girl—what's her name?"

"Because——" Tess hesitated, and ignored the first question. "I saw a picture of Christine Blair once. That's all."

"I see." Dick was not prompted to explanation by the remark. "Anything else?"

"One other thing, Dick." Tess wondered, as she said it, why she did not take the opportunity of telling him that she had seen Christine Blair's picture in his own collar box, and why she was afraid to tell him that, lest she precipitate the crisis she had invited by arranging this interview.

"What is it?"

Tess pointed to the safe. "In that safe, Dick, the other day, I found a list, carefully hidden in a secret compartment, of the various jewels which were stolen from Uncle Hector on that night."

"Did you?" Dick was too cool, although Tess did not realize it at the time. He was much too self-possessed, was acting too well, was overdoing it. But all she could understand was that her series of revelations appeared to be having no effect on him, and that therefore he must be innocent. It seemed to lighten her task considerably.

"Yes. That list was of curious, perhaps dreadful significance, Dick."

"Why do you say dreadful?"

"Its details corresponded with those given in the newspaper the other day by the Gray Wolf. I mean when he wrote and said he held the loot of the Brethren of the Shadows."

"Tess!" Dick surveyed her with a semihumorous expression. "Are you sure you're not wandering a little?"

"It's true, Dick; how true you will learn in a minute."

For just one second his eyes hardened, and a light leaped and died behind them. "How, Tess?"

The girl gathered herself to strike. She must do it, though she knew she would strike at her own heart with the action. She stood up, leaning with one hand on the table, and stretched out the other toward Dick, opening it, palm upward, as she did so, so that the little gray wolf was revealed lying on it.

"Last night the list was stolen from the safe, and this was left in its place. I have sent for you to come here, Dick—to ask you"—she was stumbling, repeating herself, her eyes burning into his, and her face all pitiful—"to ask you if you put it there?"

For a moment Dick sat, still cool and collected, his arms folded. Then he too got to his feet.

"Do you mean, Tess——" he began.

Tess nodded dumbly. "I do, Dick! I can't help it. All these things I've discovered—and that. Did you?"

Dick took her hand, the one in which she held the gray wolf, and his fingers closed over it.

"Tess," he said quietly. "I know nothing about that list, and nothing about the stealing of it, nothing about the leaving of this gray wolf in the safe. If I give you my word of honor to that effect, you will take it, won't you?"

She looked at him with wild hope in her eyes, with love and some shame and a great self-reproach. "This is true, Dick?"

"On my word, dear," he said gravely.

A little sob escaped her, and her head drooped. "Dick! You don't know—what this means—to me. All the hours of doubt and worry and——"

She swayed slightly, and he came quickly round the table to her, taking her in his arms, and pulling her close to him, so that her head was buried against his shoulder. She was crying unrestrainedly, her hands clasped tight at his neck, as though she clung to him for support, to prevent his leaving her.

"I love you, dear," she whispered. "And all the agony of this thing has been too much for me. I know it now. I thought I could go on. Then I found things that pointed to you. I was frightened and hurt; but now I'm ever so happy, Dick, ever so happy! I don't mind, because you are safe and everything is all right."

He bent over her and kissed her hair, holding her head down against his shoulder gently, so that she could not look up and see his face as it stared across her blankly to the wall beyond. He dared not allow her to look on the strain and remorse in his eyes, and the harsh set of his lips, as she poured out to him all her relief and her happiness regained!

CHAPTER XXX.

MR. BARTHOLOMEW PLANS.

MR. BARTHOLOMEW, as he had confidently anticipated, met Sarson when he took that morning walk on his last day at his old friend Hector Cunningham's house.

He took the road up the hill in the direction of Morganburg, and there he encountered Sarson. That burly personage had obviously been looking out for him, for he lurched into the roadway and stood grinning.

"Hello, Bart! Thought I'd see you if I hung around long enough. How's things?"

Mr. Bartholomew eyed the great, hulking creature with considerable disfavor. "All right, Sarson. I came to look for you."

"Oh!" Sarson was agreeably surprised. "Why?"

"I wished to tell you that you're a damn fool!"

The big man scowled. "Here, cut that stuff out, Bart. Things are so between us that I stand no more of your bawling out. I suppose you're mad at me because I've come down here, instead of playing the nice, good little boy and doing what I'm told, staying back in Chi, while you get the goods and skip?" He sliced one of his huge hands across the front of him. "But I'm not standing for it, Bart, so you can paste that in your hat and look at it every time you go to church. I've got the straightest line on you that was ever drawn, and I'm sticking close—so close you'll think I'm your shadow."

Mr. Bartholomew gestured impatiently. "Even allowing that a fool like you is entitled to suspect everybody with whom he is associated, that doesn't mean that you've got to come here and prowl about in the gardens of Hector's house, arousing suspicion and getting yourself seen!"

Sarson's scowl relaxed a little. "Oh, that!" he said indifferently. "I thought I'd snoop round and see the fun; kind of pictured myself out in the cold, cold night, while you were snugly tucked in your little bed."

Mr. Bartholomew eyed him sternly. "I have already expressed my opinion of you, Sarson. That opinion holds. I

have said you were seen. Do you realize what that means?"

"Who saw me?" Sarson was truculently defiant.

Mr. Bartholomew assumed a mysterious mien. "Let's sit down," he said. "There's a tree trunk over there behind some bushes, where we can't be seen from the road. I want to talk to you."

He turned in the direction he was indicating, and Sarson followed him. The big man was a little puzzled and rather frightened. In Mr. Bartholomew's presence he was always rather overawed; it was only when he was alone that he built his grandiose schemes of establishing an equality with his sleek, smooth-spoken confederate.

They reached the tree trunk and sat down, turning slightly so that they faced each other.

Mr. Bartholomew drove home his thrust farther. "I repeat," he said quietly, "that you were seen."

"Well?" Sarson was exasperated. "Don't be so damn secretive about it. Who saw me?"

"Jack Benson!"

Sarson did not immediately reply. He could not. Mr. Bartholomew's pronouncement had stilled his tongue, had sent the blood from his face, and filled his eyes with fear. Then rage swept him.

"What the hell are you trying to tell me, Bartholomew?" he demanded.

"The truth!" Mr. Bartholomew stabbed a shapely white finger toward his companion. "Listen here, Sarson. I've told you more than once that there's more in this game than you imagine, and I'm telling you again so that you won't go blundering round and getting your neck broken. You do what I——"

"Blundering round!" Sarson broke in. "I like that! Damned if I don't! You find out a lot of stuff and keep it to yourself, and then grumble at me because I happen to cross one of the lines you've hit on. You let me in on everything, and I'll see that I don't queer you!"

Mr. Bartholomew blinked at him through his glasses. "There is no need, Sarson, for any lengthy explanation, and no time. We are both sufficiently in trouble for us to be forced to trust each other. I confess that I want your help. It is evident that you need mine. Now look here. Are you going to trust me and do what I suggest?"

Sarson moved uneasily. "Sounds good," he said, with the suspicion of a sneer. "But I wasn't born last night. You see, Bart, I know you!" Recollection came to him, and he flared: "Anyhow, how do you know that Benson saw me?"

"Because he told me so."

"Benson told you so!" Sarson repeated it slowly, his eyes fixed on Mr. Bartholomew's face. Then he laughed. "I get you, Bart. You're a friend of Benson's, and then some. He asks your advice, eh?"

"I am a friend of his, but only because he thinks I am not aware of his real identity." Mr. Bartholomew pointed vaguely in the direction of Cunningham's house. "Benson is staying down there under the name of Cartwright, as a friend of Dick Langley's."

"Phew!" Sarson's sneer was gone. "Friend of his, eh? And he——"

"Exactly," said Mr. Bartholomew. "Now you begin to understand, don't you? And you realize what a mess you have made of things."

Sarson fingered his heavy chin. "What a game, eh? Benson a pal of Dick Langley's!" He shot a glance at Mr. Bartholomew. "And is this all you came to tell me?"

"No. I have a plan to put before you, and I want your coöperation. I warn you, before I start, that it is a desperate plan, but, as far as I can see, the only one possible to us under the circumstances."

"Why?"

"Because——" Mr. Bartholomew was very impressive. "Because within the next twenty-four hours the Gray Wolf will be arrested!"

"You think so?"

"I'm sure of it."

"And will it hurt us?"

"Positively. I am certain that once he is arrested he will blow the works on us, if I may be permitted to employ a term you will readily understand. Once he is caught, his chance of getting us himself will be gone. So he will be forced to use the law. He will tell all he knows of us—and I assure you it is sufficient to get us into serious trouble—and then take what's coming to him. All this unless we hold something which will prevent him from doing so."

"I see." Sarson was nodding slowly. "I'm getting on to you. You mean that even the Gray Wolf might think he's too much in love to hurt somebody else, eh?"

"Sarson, you are brighter this morning than I have ever known you. You have guessed at my plan. This is it."

He spoke rapidly for about ten minutes, emphasizing his points with rapid movements of his little hands, while Sarson listened attentively.

"Some plan!" he said, when Mr. Bartholomew had finished. "And the biggest risk I've ever hit on. It'll take some handling, Bart, if the girl isn't to suspect."

"The girl will never suspect. She won't know she's under a threat. But the Gray Wolf will! That's what we want to get at!"

"Sure!" Sarson gave the matter no consideration, for he was of little use in planning things. "I'm on, Bart."

"Right!" Mr. Bartholomew got to his feet. "You know what to do, and where to meet me, and everything. I'm going back now to talk to the girl."

He walked down the hill toward Hector Cunningham's house.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE TRUTH.

AFTER lunch, Mr. Bartholomew made an opportunity to speak to Tess alone. Nell Remington had returned from Morganburg, and was challenging Dick to a billiard match. Mr. Bartholomew found a moment in which to tell Tess that he would like to see her in the study on a matter of considerable importance affecting her uncle.

Tess accepted the invitation. Since her recent discoveries, she was uncertain of her feelings where Mr. Bartholomew was concerned. When he was away from her, she was afraid of him and repulsed by him. When he was with her, his benevolence and his years impressed her, so that she felt she could trust him.

They went together to the study, and Mr. Bartholomew carefully closed the door after him. He looked very serious and strained.

"Miss Cunningham," he said, with some hesitation. "I wish, before I begin, to emphasize the number of years I was your uncle's friend, and the fact that I therefore have your interests altogether at heart."

"Why is this, Mr. Bartholomew?" asked Tess.

Her guest fidgeted with his hands. "I may say that I was not satisfied regarding Hector's death, and I have been making inquiries—or, rather, having inquiries made on my behalf—into the circumstances, with the result that a very dreadful fact has come to light."

Tess felt her heart beating thunderously. "What do you mean?"

He paused for a moment, and then spoke like a man taking a plunge.

"We have discovered the identity of the Gray Wolf, Miss Cunningham. I am sorry to have to tell you this, because——"

Tess broke in, her eyes wild, her whole body atremble. "Not——"

Mr. Bartholomew nodded slowly. "He is the man you know as Dick Langley!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE TRAP.

TESS leaned heavily on the table, her gaze fixed on Mr. Bartholomew. With a tremendous effort she controlled herself and strove to speak calmly.

"That is a very serious thing to say, Mr. Bartholomew. I am engaged to be married to Dick."

The old man nodded slowly. "That is why I considered it incumbent on me to tell you, Miss Cunningham. As I have already said, I was your uncle's friend, his oldest friend, and as such I have your interests at heart. Since you consulted me the other day, I have been urging my inquiries forward, and have discovered several things of quite startling interest."

"Oh, yes." Tess answered mechanically. Mr. Bartholomew's statement that Dick was the Gray Wolf had given new life to all her suspicions, the suspicions which her interview with Dick had subdued, but not killed. Yet she had begun to wonder if Mr. Bartholomew himself were the Gray Wolf, and she remembered that as she thought of Dick.

Before her uncle's death, she would have accepted Mr. Bartholomew's accusation as a ridiculous slander, and have insisted on his immediately facing Dick and repeating his statement. But the swift development of the past days had made her cooler, had steeled her against emergencies, and she approached the situation warily and with a certain detached logic on which the crafty old schemer had hardly reckoned.

"What are these things?" she asked, and sat down on the nearest chair, for, despite her poise, she felt she could not stand any longer without evidencing signs of faintness.

Mr. Bartholomew seated himself, and carefully considered his words. He spoke with a certain, well-assumed self-satisfaction. "I think I might claim credit for practically the entire discovery," he said. "After Hector was killed, and following the advent of the Gray Wolf, I sat down to consider the whole affair. I thought over the various people mixed up in it, and marked down three as being folk of whom we did not know a great deal."

"Who were the three?"

"Mr. Langley, his friend, Mr. Cartwright, and Miss Remington."

Tess nodded. Mr. Bartholomew was stating his case well, and she was impressed. He had selected the three people any honest, shrewd business man might have selected as a basis for inquiries into the murder.

"I asked questions about all three, selecting Mr. Langley as the first, by mere chance. Do you know what my first move was in connection with him, Miss Cunningham?"

Tess shook her head. "I'm afraid I can't guess."

"I remembered his having said on the night Hector died that he was a close friend of the son of McElvey, the banker, and that he went to college with him. It was easy to find out where young McElvey was educated, and I asked for particulars of a boy named Richard Langley, who was McElvey's friend. The reply I received was illuminating."

"What was it?" Tess asked the question, although she knew the answer before Mr. Bartholomew spoke it.

"There was no boy named Richard Langley at the college while McElvey was attending there. That was the first link in the chain, and a strong one, Miss Cunningham."

"Yes." Tess could hardly speak. The logic of Mr. Bartholomew's argument was irresistible. If Dick had lied so deliberately over this one thing, then

he had probably lied over everything. If he acted a part in that way, all his life was probably acting. "You are certain of this?" she asked at last.

"Absolutely. If you will agree to a certain suggestion I am going to make later, I will show you the letter from the man who was president in the days of young McElvey, and who, as he says, remembers him quite well. I have learned other things which I will tell you in due course. For the present, I will turn to Mr. Cartwright."

"What of him?"

Mr. Bartholomew evidently wished to be dramatic at this point. "His name is not Cartwright."

"Not Cartwright?" Tess found herself a better actress than she had imagined.

"No. He is Jack Benson of the Eagle Agency, the detective who is hunting down the Gray Wolf!"

It was true, then. Tess knew that Mr. Bartholomew would not have made a mistake, and she felt her doubts of Dick strengthening, her suspicions of the plausible old gentleman before her dying. All that the latter had told her corresponded so beautifully with what she herself had discovered and suspected. In the confusion of it, she forgot the incident of the doorknob!

She contrived to speak lightly. "I hope Miss Remington came through the test all right," she said.

Mr. Bartholomew smiled. "She did, Miss Cunningham. I find that Miss Remington is all she appears to be, and a very nice girl. By the way, I would point out the significance of Benson being Dick Langley's friend."

"I have appreciated it already," said Tess simply, and added: "This is a very dreadful thing for me, Mr. Bartholomew."

That smooth individual nodded gravely. Tess' remark was the key sentence of the whole thing, and had opened the way to put his plan into execution.

"I assure you, Miss Cunningham, that nobody realizes that more than I do, and I can assure you also that I have not come to tell you the truth without first making certain of my facts. I have proofs in my hands—documentary proofs—which establish beyond all argument that Langley is the Gray Wolf."

"I should like to see them," said Tess quickly.

"You shall. They are at my Chicago residence, and I propose that we go there whenever you like, and examine them. I am not carrying them about with me for obvious reasons."

Mr. Bartholomew used the term "obvious reasons" very well, but he could not have explained it, had he been asked to do so. He saw doubt in Tess' eyes, as he made the suggestion that she should visit his house, and struck swiftly.

"Of course, you may wish to speak to Mr. Langley first," he suggested. "I am perfectly willing for you to do so, provided my name isn't mentioned, and that only because I wish to make sure that he is arrested, as"—his voice became stern—"he inevitably must be. On the other hand, you might wish to see for yourself the proofs I have mentioned, and thus be on firmer ground when the time comes for you to thrash the matter out with him once and for all."

It was a subtle proposition, and it influenced Tess in exactly the way Mr. Bartholomew had intended it should. He was not aware that she had already seen Dick and accepted his word that he was not the Gray Wolf, otherwise he would have been more sure of himself than he was even then. For, of course, without further proof Tess could not go back to Dick and say she doubted his story.

"I must see those proofs," she said slowly. "Could you bring them down?"

"I suggest that you come to Chicago

with me now," replied Mr. Bartholomew, and added quickly: "Miss Remington could come with you. She need not know why you are visiting me, and you would no doubt find her presence comforting."

This speech disarmed Tess, even though, at the same time, she realized that Mr. Bartholomew did not know Nell's real identity. She herself was no criminal, and a woman of Christine Benson's undoubted resource and courage would be a useful ally. Not that Tess was now suspecting Mr. Bartholomew. The shock—felt deep down inside her rather than on the surface—of finding that all her fears regarding Dick were confirmed, had swept everything else from her thoughts.

She feared for Dick, and for her love of him. Actually, she found herself contemplating measures to help him, if Mr. Bartholomew's proofs were overwhelming and his guilt was established. It was this eagerness to see the proofs and rush a warning to Dick which influenced her as much as anything else in her decision to accept Mr. Bartholomew's offer.

"I will come," she said, and her face was set and white. "And I will take Nell with me. Wait a minute; I'll get her up here."

She rang for a maid and told the girl to ask Miss Remington to the study. A few minutes later Nell appeared.

"Just beat Dick," she said. "He was away off form; seemed nervous and ill at ease. Missed the easiest shots."

Mr. Bartholomew glanced significantly at Tess, who felt herself trembling. It was unlike Dick to be inexpert with the cue, and the failure could probably be accounted for by unsettled nerves and a great anxiety.

"Nell," said Tess, "would you take a trip to Chicago with me? I am going up with Mr. Bartholomew to look over some papers. It is rather important business," she lied hesitantly, "about my uncle's affairs. I'd rather like you to come, if you would."

Nell answered promptly, and without a glance at Mr. Bartholomew. "Surely! If Mr. Bartholomew will have me. When are you going?"

"We were proposing to get away immediately."

"Phew! In a hurry, aren't you? All right. If you'll give me time to get my hat on straight, I'll be with you."

Nell went out of the room, and Tess, seeing her nonchalance, felt glad that she was coming. She could not have given a reason for this feeling, for there was nothing wrong with Mr. Bartholomew. He was her friend.

A little later they set off. Dick was nowhere in evidence, so they left a message for him. As a matter of fact, he had gone for a walk in an endeavor to wrestle with the greatest decision of all his life, a decision which had been thrust upon him by Tess' interview with him that morning. Yet he might have saved himself from worry, for now events were shaping their own destinies, and the people concerned were being swept along irresistibly by the current of them.

While Mr. Bartholomew, Tess, and Nell were boarding the train, Benson, who called himself Cartwright, was in close conference with a high police official in Chicago. He had previously laid the case before his chief in the Eagle Detective Agency, and both were agreed that it was time to call on the authorities for coöperation in the last move of their game. The large rewards made by certain associations of bankers and jewelers for the recovery of the loot of the Brethren of the Shadows and for the apprehension of the murderer of McElvey were still outstanding, and the winding up of the case by a double coup was regarded by Benson's employers with pleasurable anticipation that the venture to which their star operative had lately been devoting so much of

his time was going to prove extremely profitable.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

MR. BARTHOLOMEW DOUBLES.

WHEN Mr. Bartholomew began to put into execution the plan he had outlined to Sarson he had one definite objective, and one only. That was to recover the jewels, keep them for himself—he already had his lie ready for Sarson—and stall off the Gray Wolf. In this matter of stalling the Gray Wolf he made a great mistake in psychology, but as he was unaware of that his plan went forward.

He took the two girls direct to his house, and there played his first trick. He had shown them to his study when the telephone bell rang. Neither Tess nor Nell knew that the ringing was done by Sarson from an extension in another part of the house.

Mr. Bartholomew picked up the receiver. "Yes; I'm Bartholomew. What? Fifteen points! Good heaven! All Wall Street? Man, it's millions! Hold on a minute."

He covered the mouthpiece of the telephone with his hand and looked across at the girls.

"That was my broker," he said, and in his manner was a great agitation. "As you know, I deal in copper, and he's just phoned that the bottom has dropped out of the market." His voice shook slightly. "I've been pushing a big copper deal through, and this drop means a very heavy loss to me. I'm afraid I must have a conference with my brokers at once."

As though he saw the disappointment on Tess' face, he added: "I shall be gone only a little while. Perhaps half an hour, or a trifle longer, if you care to wait. If not, my other car will take you to the station. I'm awfully sorry; but you understand. It may mean absolute ruin for me."

"We'll wait," said Nell quietly, "if you care to, Tess. I don't mind a bit. Perhaps Mr. Bartholomew wouldn't object if we dined in case he should be away very long. I'm ravenously hungry."

Their designing host looked pleased. "Excuse me," he said, and shouted into the telephone: "All right; I'm coming right away. Good-by!" To the girls he added: "Order dinner yourselves. Have it here, if you wish, or in the dining room—anywhere. Make yourselves at home. I must go."

He plunged from the room, behaving exactly like a man slightly unbalanced by disturbing news, and Tess seated herself in a big chair and stared at the fire. Nell rang a bell, and told the girl who answered it to serve dinner to them in the study as soon as it was ready.

Then she turned to the desk and began to glance idly through the newspapers which were piled on one corner of it. She selected one at last, and settled down opposite Tess, who eyed her with some envy as she calmly turned over the pages.

"I wish I could take an interest in the news," she said bitterly, forgetting that Nell was not supposed to be aware of the object of their visit to the house.

"The news!" Tess glanced across the paper at her. "My dear, I'm not looking for the news. I'm looking for the market quotations on copper."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A BARGAIN.

MR. BARTHOLOMEW had ordered out his largest and most powerful car, and in it he drove straight to Hector Cunningham's house at Wickham, after leaving Tess and Nell in his own establishment. He gave his chauffeur instructions to get there with all speed, and the chauffeur obeyed implicitly. He made good time, and

shortly after dusk Mr. Bartholomew was once again at the Cunningham house.

He sought out Dick Langley, and found him in the billiard room. There must have been something unusual in his manner as he entered, for Dick, who was stooping to try a long hazard, straightened himself without taking the shot, and stared. Mr. Bartholomew shut the door behind him and advanced to the side of the billiard table opposite that on which Dick stood.

"I have come to talk business," he said quietly.

Dick replaced his cue in the rack with a deliberateness which indicated straying thoughts. "What kind of business? I'm afraid I don't understand you."

Mr. Bartholomew had never been so smooth and cold and watchful as he was in that moment. "Perhaps it will help you to understand if I call you McElvey," he said.

Dick's face set. "That was an unfortunate speech, Mr. Bartholomew."

"Was it?" Mr. Bartholomew leaned on the edge of the table. "We shall see. Miss Cunningham is at my house in Chicago!"

Dick was as restrained and careful as the cunning old rascal before him. His face did not change, though he must have appreciated the significance of the last statement. "Is that true?"

"You may get her on the phone and inquire, if you wish. I suggest that you might use as your excuse an anxiety as to whether she is returning to-night or not."

"Is anybody with her?"

"Miss Remington."

Dick's eyes changed. It was only a flicker of light, which leaped and died in them, but Mr. Bartholomew was quick to see it.

"You are glad of that?"

"I have not said so. But what does all this mean?"

"A bargain." For the moment Mr. Bartholomew did not choose to press the question of Nell Remington.

"What kind of bargain?"

"A clean-cut one, and one easy to settle. Sarson is also at my house. Perhaps you will understand what that means."

Dick nodded. "You have always been a clever man, Bartholomew. Well, go on!"

"Miss Cunningham is a prisoner in my house. She doesn't know it, but the fact remains. Neither she nor her friend could leave the place for a little while, even if they wished to do so. They would be stopped very tactfully and politely, but stopped. Perhaps I had better amplify that point."

"If you wish."

Mr. Bartholomew spoke carefully. "I wished to handle this matter as discreetly as possible, and I did not wish to let any more people into what I might term the know than I could possibly help. I am using Miss Cunningham" —Dick flinched at the phrase—"but if you are reasonable she need never become aware of it." Bartholomew leaned forward across the table. "If you are not, she will never leave my house at all."

"I guessed that."

Dick was curiously undisturbed, but he evinced not the slightest emotion. This discussion of theirs was like the crossing of two finely tempered blades of steel. Fires might be drawn, they might clash fiercely, but no mark would show on their surfaces.

"I suppose Sarson is the instrument?"

Mr. Bartholomew nodded. "Sarson has his instructions, and they cover all eventualities. I won't bore you by repeating them, but I can assure you that if I don't go back, if I am delayed, if you do not agree to my terms; in fact, if anything goes wrong at all, Miss Cunningham will pay with her life; and, of course, I am afraid Miss Rem-

ington will also have to be included in the account, which would be a pity."

"It would," Dick agreed dryly.

"It would do no good to telephone the police to go to the house and rescue the young ladies," Mr. Bartholomew continued suavely, "because, in the event of any attempt to force an entrance, Sarson has orders to—ah—perform the unpleasant task assigned to him and make good his escape by a secret, underground exit. As I have said, his instructions cover all eventualities, and our excellent Sarson is a thoroughly ruthless and unscrupulous person. I can rely on him absolutely!"

Dick's eyes searched the shrewd old schemer's face. "Bartholomew," he said slowly, "you're the vilest murdering scoundrel I've ever met!"

Mr. Bartholomew blinked at him. "I play my own hand," he said smoothly. "And now for our bargain."

"I am waiting to hear it."

Mr. Bartholomew ran a delicate white finger along the edge of the cushion. "First, I want those jewels."

"Yes."

"Second, the list."

"Yes."

"Third, no more molestation of the Brethren of the Shadows. I would take your word for that."

"Thank you." Dick studied him for a while in silence. "I'll give you the jewels, Bartholomew," he said, "because I suppose I shall have to do so. As regards the molestation"—he paused, as though struggling with his inclinations—"I suppose I must surrender that, too, if it means saving Tess and Nell from that brute, Sarson. But as far as the list is concerned, I don't know what you're talking about."

Mr. Bartholomew felt suddenly sick, and the table seemed to slide away from him. "You took that list from Hector's safe!" he declared hoarsely.

Dick shook his head. "Never heard of it, I tell you."

Mr. Bartholomew was thinking of Cartwright, alias Benson! Tess had said that Cartwright carried little gray wolves with him! Suppose, even now, that list were in the hands of the law! It was the unforeseen, the thing on which Mr. Bartholomew had not reckoned when he laid his plans. Benson was cleverer than he had thought, and he cursed himself for not making due allowance for the man. He heard Dick speaking, as from a great distance.

"Further, as to that molestation question, Bartholomew, the clause is a bit too strong. I can't promise not to hunt you. I've just been thinking about it. I will give you the jewels, but the rest I reserve to myself. Is it a bargain?"

Mr. Bartholomew forced himself to think quickly and clearly.

The law must by now be definitely on his trail. Dick was offering him the jewels, a vast fortune in a small compass. Back at his Chicago residence he had always a bag packed ready for immediate flight, together with a large sum in readily convertible cash.

He had no time to argue, for he remembered that Cartwright had gone to Chicago that day, presumably on business, probably to make final arrangements for a clean sweep of the whole board, the arrest of himself and the Gray Wolf.

"I'll have the jewels, McElvey," he said unsteadily.

Dick glanced at him curiously. "You look upset, Bartholomew. Anybody would think you had lost instead of won."

He was wondering why this shrewd trickster refrained from arguing out the question of further molestation of the Brethren of the Shadows.

"Get the jewels," said Mr. Bartholomew.

Dick walked from the room, and while he was gone the old gentleman stepped to the sideboard and helped

himself to a nip of whisky from the late Hector Cunningham's remaining pre-Volstead stock. It steadied him considerably, and clarified his mental processes.

He could get the jewels and release the two girls. That would be all right. He dared not risk having more crimes on his hands now, for already he was feeling the weight of those others, scattered back through the long, dark years.

He could get the jewels, and he must contrive to keep them. Sarson was not entitled to a share, for Sarson had run no risks, and had done nothing except butt in when he was not wanted, and create awkward situations. He must lie to Sarson somehow, and he must think of the lie on his way back to Chicago.

Dick brought the jewels down to the billiard room and handed them across to the crafty rogue who was waiting for them. "There you are," he said. "And now I suppose you'll be going?"

Mr. Bartholomew nodded. "Yes."

Dick stepped close to him. "Listen, Bartholomew. I'm giving you three quarters of an hour. At the end of that time I shall start after you!"

Mr. Bartholomew backed to the door. "You're not forgetting that Miss Cunningham is not yet released," he said, and was gone.

Dick watched him vanish down the corridor, and afterward walked moodily out to the hall of the house. It was empty, and seemed to typify his life, empty and shadowed and cold. After this night there could be no dawn for him, for on this night Tess must learn everything. Yet he still had work to do. He must deal with Mr. Bartholomew and Sarson.

He heard the grate of a key in the front-door lock, and turned to see Cartwright, with a skeleton key in his hand, shutting the door after him. He looked across at Dick, and smiled.

"Well, how's the Gray Wolf this evening?" he asked.

CHAPTER XXXV.

FRIENDS WITH THE ENEMY.

A WEEK earlier that greeting of Cartwright's would have provoked Dick Langley to well-assumed indignation and prompted within him some fear. Now it seemed to leave him cold. He eyed Cartwright blankly for a few seconds and then said: "Good evening, Benson. I suppose you've brought the warrant with you?"

"I have a warrant."

"I thought you'd gone to fetch it when you cleared off to-day."

"I hadn't, as a matter of fact." Benson turned toward the billiard room. "Come inside a minute. I want to talk to you, McElvey."

"So you've found that out, too?" asked Dick, following him into the billiard room.

It was typical of Benson's confidence that he should precede Dick, turning his back deliberately on the notorious Gray Wolf, now cornered at last.

Benson laughed over his shoulder. "It's my job to find out things, old son. Hello! Nobody here! Where are they?"

"They've gone!"

They were in the room by that time, and the detective turned swiftly on Dick.

"Gone! What do you mean?"

Dick regarded him steadily. "Tess and your wife have gone to Mr. Bartholomew's house in Chicago!"

A hard smile twisted Benson's lips. "You seem to know as much as I do," he said. "Bartholomew's, eh? What the devil did they do that for? Christine should have known——"

"I think she did know," replied Dick. "But Bartholomew tricked Tess, and Tess wanted somebody to go with her. I shall probably not see your wife again, Benson, but I should like you to convey to her my gratitude for the risk she has taken on Tess' behalf."

"Yes." The detective spoke ab-

sently and turned away, walking from Dick to the billiard table, and bowling the balls about it, watching them strike off the cushions at angles.

Dick stood by the door watching him. It would have been the easiest thing in the world for him to escape, to step back through the door and lock it, leaving Benson a prisoner in the billiard room; but the idea never entered his head. This night had seen the finish of the Gray Wolf's course. His identity was known, and the terror of his anonymity was stripped from him. He had failed!

The bitterness of that acknowledgment hurt him far more than the fact that he was known. This hound of the law had caught him before he caught his quarry. In the race, Benson had won. On the threshold of achieving all his revenge on the Brethren, the hand of Benson had stretched across and stopped him.

The hand of Benson—and the hand of Tess. The Gray Wolf realized that more slowly. After his talk with Tess that morning, he could never have gone on. He understood now why he had surrendered so easily to Mr. Bartholomew's threats, and had handed over the jewels to that suave rascal's keeping, without pausing to consider how large a percentage of bluff his words might hold. It was because he had come to understand all that it would mean to Tess when she discovered everything. The fire of his vengeance had become cold ashes, had burned itself out, leaving his life empty and desolate, as all fires must.

Benson suddenly ceased to play with the billiard balls and turned to him. "Look here, McElvey. I said just now that I held a warrant. Do you know whose name is on it?"

"Richard Thomson Campbell McElvey," said the Gray Wolf, with a smile.

Benson shook his head. "Bartholomew Bartholomew, wanted for the murder of McElvey, the banker, and Hector Cunningham, leader of the gang known as the Brethren of the Shadows. There is another man, Sarson, whom I shall detain on suspicion, until I can prove his guilt in sundry other crimes."

Dick stared. "But what about me?"

The detective spread his hands. "I found out some time ago that you were the Gray Wolf, and I confess that I thought I had something on you when Cunningham was murdered. Then other things came along—those finger prints I mentioned, and such—and I realized that you had not killed Cunningham. I was faced with this situation, therefore. I knew the Gray Wolf, was speaking to him every day, knew he was supposed to be a notorious criminal, but I could not prove that he had committed a single crime! I am still unable to prove it!"

Dick's heart leaped. "I have never committed a crime, Benson. That's easy to say, perhaps. I have taken from some men things which I wanted. Haltmeyer was one, but Haltmeyer dared not charge me. Everything else has been——"

"I know," broke in the detective. "You don't think I've been in on this case without analyzing your little exploits. It was that analysis which first put me on the right track. I began to see that the Gray Wolf was an extraordinary person, who chose to blacken his own name by a series of ingenious deeds which, on the face of them, appeared to be criminal, but which, when probed deeply, were perfectly innocuous. That there was a motive in it, I was sure, because a man capable of planning such clever things would never act without some object. So I came to McElvey at last and understood."

Dick nodded. That he was free of Benson and the law was incredible, and yet, as he surveyed it, he knew he could

not have been otherwise, for, unless the finding of the gray wolf beside Cunningham's body was taken as evidence of his guilt, he must have gone free. He remembered Mr. Bartholomew.

"Bartholomew has been here this evening," he said; "and he has blackmailed me by threatening to kill Tess. I think we should go to that Chicago house of his, or you should go——"

Benson considered him. "You're right, McElvey. I should go." Some traces of agitation showed through the ease of his manner. "I must go. Christine there and those two men——"

He turned to the door, and when he reached it, looked over his shoulder at Dick.

"The Gray Wolf and the Eagle Detective Agency can't act together, McElvey. It isn't done."

"I'll wait here," said Dick. "Or else—perhaps I'd better clear out before Tess gets back."

Benson's eyes twinkled. "It's night—dark. And I believe the Gray Wolf loved the darkness. So long!"

He went, and Dick stood rigid by the billiard table, the detective's last words ringing in his ears.

Then he moved toward the door, all his lassitude dropped from him. It was night. There was work for the Gray Wolf in Chicago, work the Gray Wolf might do, perhaps the last of all the Gray Wolf's exploits!

Despite Benson's start, Dick was out of the house before him. The Gray Wolf was running his last trail!

CHAPTER XXXVI.

CONFIDENCES.

TESS looked at Nell, as that young lady turned over the pages of the newspaper. "Why look for quotations on copper?" she asked.

Nell eyed her lazily. "Because I think friend Bartholomew is lying, and these quotations may prove it. I wondered what story he was going to tell us and I appreciate his ingenuity."

Tess was a little shaken. "You wondered what story——" she began. "Do you mean that I have been tricked?"

"And trapped," said Nell quietly, "if one may be melodramatic. On what pretext did Bartholomew get you here?"

Tess saw that her companion had dropped all pretense now and was acting naturally. She was no longer the laughing, careless girl who pretended to be Nell Remington, but a shrewd, clever little woman, pinned in a corner, and thinking clearly and swiftly to find a way out. Tess conceived that it might be better if all the cards were tabled, and she allowed the other girl to see exactly how much she knew.

"Before I answer your question," she said, "I would like to tell you that I know who you are. You are Christine Benson, the wife of Jack Benson, the detective."

Christine nodded. "Of course. You went to Dick Langley's bedroom after you saw me leave it. I was furious at being caught that afternoon. I suppose you found my picture in his collar box?"

"Yes." Tess eyed her accusingly. "I thought you were my friend."

"I am your friend, Tess. That's why I'm here. That's why I was at your house."

"I don't understand you," said Tess.

"You don't? I'll explain, then. My husband was hunting the Gray Wolf and thought he had run him down. He found the Gray Wolf engaged to be married to a nice girl. Further, he discovered other things, that this nice girl's uncle was mixed up with a dreadful criminal organization, and that she believed implicitly in the sincerity of her uncle's friend, one of the most dangerous men in the country. My husband thought it might be well if that nice girl had some other girl whom she could trust, and who knew all the game, to

be with her and help her. He sent me along. That is why I came with you to-night, although I knew we were walking into a trap. But I couldn't refuse to come. You had already decided to do so. Had I protested, Bartholomew's suspicions would have been aroused, and at this stage in the game that would have been fatal. I had to fall in with the suggestion and come, without a moment's hesitation. Does that explain?"

Tess nodded. Her eyes were misty. "I think I need a friend," she said simply, "because the reason I am here is that Mr. Bartholomew spoke about Dick and——"

Christine Benson smiled at her kindly. "I know all about Dick. He is the Gray Wolf!"

"It is true?" Tess' face was pitiful and strained.

"Yes," said Christine gravely.

"Oh!" Tess drooped, and her head bowed over her hands.

Christine got to her feet and came across to her, sitting on the arm of the great chair and putting her arm about the other girl's shoulders.

"I think you ought to know all about Dick," she said.

Tess looked up. "He lied to me today. A list was taken from my uncle's safe, a list of jewels stolen by the Brethren of the Shadows, and in its stead was left a gray wolf. Dick said he knew nothing about it."

"He was speaking the truth. My husband took the list and left the gray wolf—you will understand that he has collected several during his operations—for the benefit of Mr. Bartholomew. So Dick was right about that."

"It was a half lie," protested Tess, on the verge of tears. "He should have told me everything."

"Perhaps. Although he must have been sorely tempted not to do so, don't you think? And he has been upset ever since. I saw that when I was playing billiards with him. Now shall I tell you all about him?"

"If you wish." Tess spoke tonelessly, and in her attitude was a great indifference.

Christine told of the shooting of McElvey, of Dick's campaign of vengeance, and of how he had tracked the Brethren down through the years, accomplishing what the police and the leading detective agencies had failed to do.

"And this is the end," she said. "Through him, and through him alone, my husband has been enabled to name the survivors of the Brethren, for had he not struck the Gray Wolf's trail, he would never have come upon that of Bartholomew and Sarson. And now the law will do what the Gray Wolf would have done, and punish the Brethren for their crimes."

During the recital Tess' interest had wakened, and at the end of it she was listening with shining eyes.

"And what will the law do to him—to Dick?" she asked.

Christine surveyed her lazily. "My husband might be able to tell you that. I haven't seen him since he left Wickham this morning."

Tess was suddenly moved to protest. "He has done nothing wrong! He has helped the law. They can't hurt him!"

"He is a notorious criminal," said Christine quietly.

"He is not! It is the reputation which has been foisted on him." Tess rose to her feet. "I think I shall go back to Wickham right away and warn him against you and your husband."

Her companion did not smile, and still her eyes viewed Tess lazily. She reveled in this touch of romance in the sordid story of the Brethren, and it seemed natural that she, the woman, should supply it.

"If you wish," she said.

Tess shot one look at her, then walked to the door of the room, pulled it open,

and halted. She stood for a second and turned back, shutting the door after her. Her face was pale.

"There is a man out there," she said, "leaning against the wall, farther down, the man called Sarson! He—he looked at me!"

Christine nodded. "Friend Bartholomew is taking no chances. I can foresee some excitement when he returns."

"But—but what can he do? Where has he gone? Why is he keeping us here?"

The detective's wife gestured feebly. "So many questions, my dear! I don't know where he has gone, nor what he can do. But I can hazard a suggestion as to why we, or rather why you are here. Don't you understand that he is fighting the Gray Wolf and that the Gray Wolf loves you?"

"I see." Tess returned to her chair and looked up at Christine. "You knew all this before we came. You guessed?"

"I have already said so."

Tess took her hand. "I am ever so grateful to you. I have been wandering round in this maze, thinking I was finding a path for myself through it, thinking you were an enemy. And now I find you are my friend. We must wait, I suppose. Only I wish you had not come and run all this risk for me."

"There is no risk. My husband must be here soon."

Tess did not reply. But she wondered if, at the last, as though by magic, the Gray Wolf might not come as well.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

ARRIVALS.

MR. BARTHOLOMEW reached his house, and the first person he met was Sarson. The big man encountered him in the hall, and Mr. Bartholomew scowled as he saw him.

"I thought you were supposed to be watching those women," he said.

Sarson shrugged his great shoulders. "They don't want no watching. How'd you get on?"

"He called my bluff. Refuses to come across, and says he's going to get after us at once."

Sarson stared. "Is this straight?"

Mr. Bartholomew snarled at him. "Do you think I'm telling lies at this juncture? The Gray Wolf is all in. Benson and the police are on his trail, and he knows it. I've already pointed out to you that his arrest is a matter of hours. He'll be taken by the police, and he'll put them on to us."

"What we gotta do?" Sarson was shaken and unnerved by Mr. Bartholomew's statement. He saw the electric chair very vividly, and his imagination did not steady him.

"We've got to skip," said Mr. Bartholomew tersely. "That's all. Come with me, and I'll split what cash I've got with you. Then we'll separate."

The speed of his utterance, the overwhelming nature of the peril he had outlined, drove from Sarson's mind all power to analyze Mr. Bartholomew's statement. He had no time to doubt the old trickster's word, but lumbered up the stairs toward the study in a state of abject terror.

Mr. Bartholomew went inside, with Sarson at his heels.

"How's copper, Mr. Bartholomew?" asked Christine, with a smile.

Mr. Bartholomew had to act. That night he had many things to do, and the first of them was to calm all suspicion in the minds of the girls while he got rid of Sarson.

On his way back to Chicago, he had thought it all out. He might still balk the Gray Wolf, ward off the peril of his threat, and hold on to all he had gained, if he could get rid of Sarson.

"I have had a trying time," he said, smiling back at his questioner. "Today was a bad one for me, but things may be better to-morrow. Have you met my friend, Mr. Sarson?"

"I'm not sure. Introduce us, anyhow."

Mr. Sarson was about to be presented, when Tess felt she could stand it no longer.

"Just a minte, Christine!" she cried. "I must know exactly——"

"Christine!" Mr. Bartholomew interrupted her, and his face was hard and repellant. His eyes burned as they stared at the fair impostor.

Tess began to stammer, while Christine appeared not a bit disconcerted by Tess' faux pas.

Mr. Bartholomew was leaning forward, and repeating: "Christine—Christine! Heaven! Christine Blair!"

"Benson, Mr. Bartholomew," corrected Christine gently.

It was Sarson who spoke then. "Not the wife of Benson, the——"

"The wife of Jack Benson, the detective, Mr. Sarson," said that young lady politely.

There was a moment of silence, and then Sarson swung round on Mr. Bartholomew like a fury.

"This is your plan!" he stormed. "This is the way you arrange things! Bringing her here—Benson's wife—and——"

Mr. Bartholomew stopped him with a gesture that was like a blow. His face was as white as death, but there was no fear in his eyes, only a dreadful resolution and unfaltering courage. "This alters things," he said heavily.

Tess caught her breath at his tone, while Christine's eyes narrowed slightly.

"Stop fooling, Sarson!" he added. "And don't yelp around like a schoolboy with the toothache. We've got to do something and do it quick!"

Sarson steadied himself. "You talk," he said, "after you've done this mischief—getting that woman here, showing her our hand." He swung to Christine. "You knew everything before you came here!"

Christine nodded. "I knew a little, Mr. Sarson; perhaps nearly as much as you in some ways, in others a great deal more."

The hulking creature made a curious noise in his throat. "I suppose that last bit refers to your husband, eh?"

"It might."

Of the two men, Tess thought Sarson the more dangerous at the moment. She could not imagine Mr. Bartholomew indulging in any violence toward herself and Christine, but Sarson in his present mood seemed capable of anything. Yet, even then, Tess did not realize the full extent of the danger in which she and the other girl stood.

But Christine realized it, and she played for time. If only she could keep Sarson and Mr. Bartholomew talking until her husband came, as come he must, she argued. Something must have been accomplished that day, something definite settled, and at any moment now her husband might arrive at the house with the police at his back, or without them. She knew Benson's way, knew that he loved to act alone, and that he might come here, thinking his visit a surprise, only to find that he was expected.

If he did come alone, and he was expected, then the game might go differently from what she imagined, and the morning might tell a tale of a night's disaster, with Mr. Bartholomew and Sarson fleeing for their lives, leaving death behind them.

Sarson turned from Christine back to Mr. Bartholomew. "Have you thought?" he demanded ferociously.

Mr. Bartholomew pulled out a gun. It was the first time Tess had seen a weapon in his hand, and a little cry escaped her. Christine saw the significance of the action.

Not only did Mr. Bartholomew wish to make sure that she took no aggressive action, but he also wished to point out to the raging Sarson that he was master of the situation.

"We've got time, Sarson," he said. "We're in my house, filled with my servants. Precipitancy never got us anywhere. Of one thing we are now sure, and that is that we must get on the run." He considered the two girls, and indicated Tess with his weapon.

"I shall hold you," he said quietly, "because I still need you." His face contorted. "I am not to be beaten by the Gray Wolf, even at the end. I'll show him yet that I, too, can fight to the last ditch, and I'll show him through you."

The gun swung to Christine. "As for you——" He paused, as though weighing his words. "I think it might be better for all of us if you died tonight. Dead tongues cannot speak and tell the things live eyes have seen."

Tess choked, while Sarson moistened his lips and stared at Mr. Bartholomew. He had never known his leader so dreadful as in those moments when all the structure of his life was crumbling to dust.

"Mr. Bartholomew!" Tess was speaking wildly, almost incoherently. "You mustn't—you—— She came with me! It was my fault. I didn't know. You told me——"

"Silence!" Mr. Bartholomew thundered the word, and Tess drew back from him. "We have no more time for arguing. Sarson, you'll find money in that drawer over there. Get it out!"

Sarson bent to the drawer and had pulled it open, when the door of the room swung back and Hawkins, the secretary, stepped in. He looked startled and white, and took no more notice of Mr. Bartholomew's gun than if it had been a fountain pen.

"There's a man downstairs, boss," he said, "name of Cartwright. He wants to see you. He's—the man—you know——"

Benson, confident that Mr. Bartholomew was unaware of his identity, had called, and the secretary, thinking that the girls might not know of the dual rôle played by that young man, was conveying to his employer the information that his latest visitor was the detective.

"Show him up," snapped Mr. Bartholomew. As Hawkins withdrew, he turned to the girls. "If either of you utters a sound, I shall shoot Benson as he enters that door!"

Both Christine and Tess were silent. All Christine's nonchalance was gone, and she was white to the lips. Mr. Bartholomew drew back, so that anybody walking into the room could not immediately see him.

The door opened again, and Benson stepped forward, while Hawkins closed the door after him and remained outside.

"Hello! I——"

"Hands up, Benson," said Mr. Bartholomew coolly. "Sarson! Search him!"

The huge scoundrel was on the detective like a tiger, gripping both his wrists above his head with one giant fist, while he ran through his pockets with the other hand. From one of them he produced a revolver, and tossed it onto the desk top. On that action swung the climax of the night's drama.

Benson, swiftly recovering from the shock of his reception, with his hands still above his head—although Sarson had now released him and stepped back—faced Mr. Bartholomew. His first words showed a quickness of thought on which Mr. Bartholomew had not counted.

"I suppose you and Sarson are splitting the jewels you've just taken from the Gray Wolf, and are skipping, eh?"

"Splitting!" Sarson roared the word, and glared at Mr. Bartholomew.

The old master rogue jerked his gun forward. Tess screamed! The curtains at the window slid aside and a black-hooded figure stepped into the room.

The Gray Wolf was taking the stage for the last time.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE BALANCE.

IT was the Gray Wolf who moved first. His left hand flicked forward, and something shining flew toward the desk top, falling with a faint tinkle upon its polished surface and glittering in the electric light.

"My card!" said the newcomer suavely. "It is the last time you will receive it, Bartholomew."

They saw then that in his right hand, down against his trouser leg, was an automatic. Mr. Bartholomew tried to speak, but only a hoarse utterance answered his efforts.

The Gray Wolf stepped forward. Tess saw that he did not look at her, or at anybody except Mr. Bartholomew. She thought that in that moment all the terror of Mr. Bartholomew's threats, all the deadliness of his mien, was a little thing beside the menace of this sinister, unchanging man who had stepped from the shadows of the night in which he worked. The horror of that hood which showed none of the thoughts or emotions of the being behind it gripped her and held her.

The Gray Wolf's power and notoriety were explained to her in those last few moments of the famous cracksman's career.

Benson had lowered his arms, and, like the Gray Wolf, he was looking at only one person in the room, Sarson, who still stood half crouched, as he had been when the Gray Wolf entered, his burning eyes fixed on the unscrupulous master, who would have cheated him and left him to his fate.

The Gray Wolf reached the desk and spoke across it to Mr. Bartholomew.

"I have hunted you a long while, Bartholomew; for ten years. I told you days ago that I would get you; and I have got you. I have never yet warned anybody without fulfilling that warning." For a moment his eyes flickered to Benson, and then back to Mr. Bartholomew. "But I have to relinquish my claim. It isn't easy, Bartholomew, and I am not surrendering it from any regard for you or from any fear of the law. I have been outside the law too long to be afraid of it. But there is somebody——" He stopped. "One cannot hurt everybody to satisfy one's ambitions." He glanced again at the detective. "He is yours, Benson!" He might have been surrendering something beyond price.

Mr. Bartholomew found his tongue. "You can say that!" he cried. "You can work with this detective! But I'll put you away, I'll—— By Heaven! I'll see you go to jail, Mr. Dick Langley McElvey—Gray Wolf—whatever you call yourself. I'll tell it all. I'll shame you all; her, too!" pointing at Tess.

Sarson moved! His action broke in on Mr. Bartholomew's speech like the stroke of an ax. One moment he was still and tense. The next he had snatched the revolver from the desk top, the one he had taken from Benson's pocket.

"For my share of the jewels, Bart!" he yelled; and fired point-blank at his traitorous confederate.

Mr. Bartholomew dropped on his face, and the Gray Wolf's automatic was lifted toward Sarson. Tess started forward and seized his arm, faint and sick though she was.

The big man smashed Benson back against the door and turned to the window. Mr. Bartholomew, making his last movement on earth, raised his head, aimed his weapon, and pulled the trigger twice. Sarson fell headlong into the fireplace, and never stirred again.

Above the clamor and the echo of it, the shrill blast of Benson's whistle sounded, summoning the police who had

been detailed to assist him in his raid and who were posted all around the house. Then his voice was heard in hurried warning.

"That hood, McElvey! Off with it! Quick!"

It was Tess who snatched the hood from the Gray Wolf's head, and crumpled it up into a ball of tight-pressed silk.

There was peace in the room where the Brethren of the Shadows had finally dissolved their infamous partnership. All that was left of Mr. Bartholomew and Sarson had been carried out. Benson was somewhere in the house superintending the police, and Christine was with him.

Dick McElvey stood near the fireplace, and by his side was Tess.

"There is a man," Dick was saying, "who wants me to go and look after the building of a railway in South America. I think I shall go. I can't ask you to forgive me, but I can only tell you that——"

Tess interrupted him. "I want you to take me with you, dear, if you will."

His eyes were alight, as he looked at her. "But after all this?" he demurred. "The Gray Wolf——"

She tossed something black into the heart of the fire, a tightly rolled ball of silk. "The Gray Wolf is dead," she said quietly. "I want to kiss the man I love!"

He drew her toward him.

THE END.

COUNTERFEITERS ENTER NEW FIELD

IT became known a short time ago that in many of the large cities where antique shops do a thriving business, counterfeiters had entered their field, concentrating their efforts upon very clever reproductions of antique cup plates. For those who are not habitual collectors of antiques, and who may not know just what a cup plate is, let it be explained that it was not considered bad form to drink from one's saucer a few generations ago. Nothing at all was thought of cooling coffee or tea by pouring it from the cup into the saucer, then sipping it from the latter. Housewives found that the wet cup when laid on the table made a mark which in many cases remained a permanent discoloration of the wood, so it became customary to place an extra plate or saucer for the cup to rest on while its owner was drinking out of the original saucer.

Later an enterprising manufacturer conceived the idea of making a small glass plate with an ornamental design for the sole purpose of protecting the table from the wet tea or coffee cup. The manufactured product became known as a cup plate, of great usefulness in the days of our great-grandmothers, but banished now to the cabinets of discriminating collectors. These cup plates were made in a limited number of standard designs of different periods, and to-day some of them are rarer than others and consequently bring better prices. It is with the rarer designs that the counterfeiters have been busy, particularly the George Washington and the Benjamin Franklin. So many spurious examples of the old cup plate have been discovered on the market of late that even antiquarians of years of experience are sometimes fooled. Now they are said to make a very thorough investigation before purchasing antique cup plates.

Signed, the Scarlet X

by John Jay Chichester

Author of "The Yellow Stain," "Mayme Was Right," etc.

CHAPTER I.

ANONYMOUS LETTERS.

HABITUALLY irascible, Roger Cole reached the factory in an ugly humor. His day had started wrong, and he stormed into the office building of the Cole Manufacturing Co., makers of Cole tires, with a black scowl on his heavy face. Employees stared after his bulky figure, with the knowledge that they would have a bad day of it, for it had been their experience that they always got the brunt of his tempers.

Tom Medbury, the manufacturer's nephew, sat for the moment at his own desk, which was just outside the door of his uncle's business sanctum, fingering a square, heavy-papered envelope which had come in the mail, and which, although it was addressed to Roger Cole and was marked "personal" in capital letters, he had taken possession of according to instructions. There was a slight, preoccupied frown between Medbury's eyes.

Within the private office Cole was settling down to work at the roomy, flat-top desk. It was a large room, the walls generously decorated with framed photographs of Cole tires adorning motor vehicles of various makes. Some of the manufacturer's testiness vanished as his eyes rested upon the roll of blue prints which reposed at the side of the desk. Those were the architect's plans for an expanded Cole Manufacturing Co., a factory that could triple and quadruple the present production.

Cole's gaze went to the window through which he could see his factory, slightly detached from the office building, a long row of one-storied structures facing Long Island Sound from the Connecticut shore. It was not a giant industry, but a prosperous and growing one; and now, thanks to a new vulcanizing process which he had recently patented, he saw himself on the road to real wealth. He visualized the home of Cole tires as spreading out imposingly, with private docks for the ships which would bring in the raw rubber from South America.

This ambitious reverie was interrupted as the door opened and Tom Medbury came in, the square envelope in his hand. A slim, dapper man was Medbury, giving a great deal of con cern to his clothes. He was still in his thirties, with a lean face and a jet-black, dabby little mustache. There was none of his uncle's ruthless driving force about him.

"Good morning, Uncle Roger," he said. "I dislike to disturb you, but——"

"Then don't," snapped out Roger Cole.

"But I feel that it is imperative," insisted the nephew. "Another one of those letters came this morning, and ——" He was interrupted by his uncle's heavy fist crashing down upon the desk.

"Didn't I tell you that I didn't want to be annoyed with any more of those crazy crank letters?" he roared. "Didn't I tell you that if any more of 'em came to tear 'em up without reading them?"

"Yes, I know you told me that, Uncle Roger. I haven't opened this one yet, but——"

"There are no 'buts'," rasped out Cole. "When I order you to do anything, do it. That goes for every employee on my pay roll, nephew or not. Tear it up!"

"Just a moment, Uncle Roger," Medbury pressed patiently. "I know that you think these letters are somebody's practical joke, but I'm afraid that it's quite a serious matter, and I think you'd better consult the police or a private detective about it. Did you ever hear of 'The Scarlet X?' "

"The—what?" stormed Cole.

"The Scarlet X, Uncle Roger. Don't know why I didn't think of that when the first and second letters came, but it didn't dawn on me until this morning. It's clear enough—being signed with the 'X' in red ink. For your sake I hope that I'm wrong, for when The Scarlet X gets on a man's trail——"

"What the devil do you think you're talking about?" answered his uncle growlingly. Surely Tom wouldn't dare to help along this insane joke; Cole was one of those men who hate to be "kidded" about anything.

"I'm talking about The Scarlet X," answered Medbury. "I can't tell you what it is except that it's a mysterious, sinister force that claims to right wrongs, a self-appointed court to deal out moral justice, and——"

"You ought to be scribbling thrillers instead of learning the tire business," Roger Cole broke in sarcastically. "This is my busy day and I've got no time for any such nonsense. Just because some crank sends me a silly letter, signed with a cross in red ink, you concoct a wild theory about something you call 'The Scarlet X.' Bah! Get back to your desk and try to earn the salary I give you. Get out!"

But Tom Medbury stood his ground with more firmness than he usually displayed with his forceful, domineering uncle.

"I'm going to have my say," he insisted doggedly. "At least you won't be able to say that I didn't warn you. If my hunch is right and The Scarlet X is on your trail, you ought to take steps for protecting yourself, for—your life is in danger."

The nephew's voice was so solemn and serious that Roger Cole, despite himself, had a faint feeling of uneasiness.

"Bunk! You've been reading the sensational newspapers."

"You may be thankful for it that I have," retorted Medbury. He sat down beside the desk, determined to say what was on his mind. The square envelope, still unopened, was in his hand.

"Hurry up and get it over with—this wild tale that you're so set on telling me," ordered Cole.

"The Scarlet X," said the nephew, "got into the newspapers about six months ago when Louis Leighton, the Wall Street pirate, was killed. And—The Scarlet X killed him!"

"Now I know you're crazy," grunted Roger Cole. "Leighton was killed in an automobile accident."

"Apparently it was an accident," broke in Tom Medbury. "It was so accepted at the time, and it was supposed that the 'X' on Leighton's forehead was just a cut from the broken glass of the wind shield, but other things happened that make it possible to surmise that it was the death brand of The Scarlet X, and that Leighton was murdered."

"Rubbish; utter rot!" snapped out the tire manufacturer, but his face had lost some of its ruddy color.

"Leighton," went on Medbury, "was the head of a gang of financial wolves who organized the Universal Oil swindle, got in a lot of investors, and then let the bottom drop out of it. There were five other men in that pool with Leighton, and a few days after Leighton's accident they all got mysterious letters signed with a scarlet 'X', telling them that what had happened to Leighton could happen to them.

"You think these letters to you are the work of a harmless crank.

"Well, so did the Universal Oil crowd. They ignored the letters at first, and just laughed. But they kept on getting warnings through the mail, at their homes. It got on their nerves, and they hired private detectives, but it was no use.

"One night Harworth Diggs got a special-delivery letter telling him that he would have a personal call from The Scarlet X. He took all sorts of precautions, had three detectives right in the house, but The Scarlet X slipped through the guard and Diggs was awakened at one o'clock in the morning with a gun poking his ribs. He was warned to make restitution to the mulcted stockholders of Universal Oil within forty-eight hours."

"You don't expect me to believe any wild yarn like that?" growlingly replied Cole.

"Believe it or not," retorted Medbury, "but you may remember that the stockholders of Universal Oil did get their money back. Those five swindlers made restitution. Naturally they tried to hush things up, but some private detective leaked, and a reporter for *The Sphere* got hold of it. I read the story some time ago, but it wasn't until this morning that I thought these letters to you might be from The Scarlet X. Great heavens, Uncle Roger, what have you done to get them on your trail?"

Roger Cole did not answer the question. He sat silently drumming his blunt fingers on the glass desk top. Then he shook his head.

"You're having a pipe dream," he said slowly. "Like as not that story in the papers was a fake. Most natural thing in the world for the writer of an anonymous letter to sign it 'X'—the unknown quantity." He freed himself from the unpleasant thoughts that his nephew had put in his mind. "No, I don't think I'll pay any attention to it, Tom, still——"

He hesitated. "I suppose we'd better have a look at that letter you've got. It's—hum—just as well, I suppose, to be on the safe side."

Medbury passed the envelope to his uncle who slitted it with a vicious stab of the paper knife and drew forth the sheet of paper—heavy, parchment-like paper that might have been the stationery of some man of affairs.

Certainly it wasn't what one would expect in a threatening letter; no pencil-scrawled, smudgy composition with palpably intentional misspellings. The typing was neat and businesslike. The sentences were terse and well worded. No illiterate crank was the author of it.

"Humph" grunted Roger Cole. "Almost the same wording as the first and second ones." He read it through again. "It must be a joke, Tom; y'see, it isn't Black Hand. They don't ask for money."

"Not outright," said Medbury, looking over his uncle's shoulder. "Reads like a form letter from a collection agency, doesn't it? That's what The Scarlet X is, anyhow, I suppose—a collection agency going after what they call 'debts of justice.'"

The letter read:

MR. ROGER COLE, President Cole Manufacturing Co., Roxton, Connecticut.

STUBBORN SIR: As we have notified you twice previously, there is in your hands for collection a certain account which we refer to as Debt of Justice Number Twelve. We have let fourteen days pass without taking any action, and you have chosen to ignore us, which is very foolish and futile. You will be given just three days more. This is the third and final notice. X.

The signature "X" was in red ink. Since no pen would draw such a wide stroke, it was evident that the heavy cross had been slashed across the paper with an ink-dipped brush.

While uncle and nephew were still staring at this amazing, vaguely worded communication the door from the outer offices opened and Mary Nash, one of

the stenographers, slipped in so silently that neither of the men heard her. She brought a sheaf of papers, dictation from the previous day, for her employer's signature. She now stood a few feet behind Roger Cole's chair, her face pale and her body trembling as she stared in startled fascination at the letter.

As an audible gasp slipped through the girl's lips Cole turned swiftly, his eyes narrowed angrily.

"What do you mean, sneaking in upon my privacy like this?" he snapped out.

"I—I wasn't sneaking," she answered shakily, seemingly unable to take her eyes from the letter with its vivid scarlet "X" at the bottom of the sheet. "I—I came in as I always do; I—I am sorry that you think that I—that I——" Her words came to a pause beneath the intent scrutiny of Cole's eyes. He had seen her agitation and the direction of her gaze and seemed on the verge of blurting out something unpleasant, but changed his mind.

"Let it pass this time," he said gruffly, "but hereafter knock when you come in. I'll take those letters, please." When the girl had beat a hasty retreat and the door closed behind her, there spread over Roger Cole's face a harshly triumphant smile.

"Did you see—her face?" he demanded.

Tom Medbury nodded. "I may have imagined it, but I thought she seemed to be rather upset over something."

"She was," Roger Cole said grimly; "over this letter." His jaw shot forward and his clenched right hand smote the desk. "She's given me the clew, young man. She's a typist; probably she wrote the letter herself."

The nephew lifted his hand in a protesting gesture. "Oh, but that's absurd. Why should she want to do that, Uncle Roger? What reason could she have for——"

"The girl's in love—that is, I suppose she is. Used to see Chester Waldron hanging around her desk every chance he got when he was working here. When I saw her face just now, I put two and two together, that's all.

"As you know, Waldron claimed that he invented my vulcanizing process. She's in a scheme with Waldron to scare me into giving him money. Like as not either she or Waldron saw that sensational muck in the papers about The Scarlet X and believed it just as you did. They thought they could scare me with it.

"All right, they've started something, and I'll finish it. I'm going to give 'em rope enough to hang themselves and then nab 'em for the pair of extortioners they are."

Tom Medbury debated this theory of his uncle's. "Waldron's claim might explain the 'debt of justice,'" he agreed, "but there is another possibility. Instead of Waldron and Mary Nash having used The Scarlet X as a bluff, it may be that they have enlisted the aid of the real Scarlet X; they may have convinced the real Scarlet X that Waldron did invent the vulcanizing process and that you do owe Waldron the price of it. If they've done that, Uncle Roger, be careful. Whether you are right or wrong you ought to play safe and go to the police."

"I'll do no such thing" snapped out Roger Cole. "I won't have the Roxton police messing this up for me. What I'm going to do is ride over to New Haven this afternoon and put the case in the hands of Faulkner's private detective agency. I'm going to land that precious pair in jail where they belong. Scarlet X—bah!"

CHAPTER II.

MR. COLE SEEKS ADVICE.

THAT afternoon Roger Cole motored to New Haven and his nephew accompanied him. They found the Faulkner Detective Agency on the second

floor of the Stringer Building, just around the corner from one of the principal business thoroughfares.

A year or so previously Faulkner had handled a minor investigation for Roger Cole, the matter of an incendiary fire started by a discharged employee, and since Cole was a manufacturer of some importance, Sam Faulkner received the uncle and nephew personally instead of turning them over to an operative. He was a big-framed man with a close-cropped, graying mustache and a stern eye; he greeted the two callers cordially.

"Not another fire at your Roxton factory, I hope, Mr. Cole," he said with an inquiring look for Tom Medbury.

"This is my nephew; learning the tire business," introduced Cole. "It isn't a fire this time, Faulkner. It's—well, I suppose it's blackmail of a fashion."

Faulkner's eyes lighted with quick interest. As a private detective he had found that blackmail cases usually bring in fat fees.

"Sit down, gentlemen, and let's hear the facts. You're a busy man, Mr. Cole, and I know that you don't want to waste any time with idle preliminaries. Smoke?" He produced a box of cigars and while Cole accepted one Medbury shook his head and drew forth a cigarette case.

"It's briefly told," began the tire manufacturer. "Two weeks ago, Faulkner, I got a letter—a crazy mess of stuff worded like a dun from a collection agency."

"May I see it?" asked the detective.

"I destroyed it," answered Cole.

"That's unfortunate."

"Oh, there's no harm done," grunted the tire maker. "It was just about the same as the others. A week later another one came, and I tore that one up and threw it away, too. My nephew here looks over the mail when it comes in and I instructed him if any more letters like that showed up to destroy 'em without bothering me about it. Then in the mail to-day there was a third; I've got that one."

"And all three were signed The Scarlet X," offered Medbury, leaning forward. "My contention is——"

"The devil take your contention!" snapped out the uncle. and then to Faulkner with an apologetic laugh, "The boy's young and cursed with too much imagination; he's been reading some slush in the newspapers and has a wild theory about some mysterious organization taking after me. That's nonsense, of course, Mr. Faulkner."

Detective Faulkner made some aimless marks on a pad of paper as he looked at the envelope which his client handed him. He made some mental notes such as "classy stationery; postmarked New York City; mailed 8 p. m., Sunday." Then he took out the letter itself and laid it out in front of him, reading carefully until he came to the scarlet X which was the signature.

He, too, had read in *The New York Sphere* the excitingly romantic news article which had speculated concerning this strange agency which had launched the business of collecting "debts of justice." And while Mr. Faulkner took little, if any, stock in it and entertained the belief that Roger Cole was being annoyed merely by some harmless crank or was the victim of practical joking friends, he did not consider it a good business policy to be too frank in voicing his opinions. If he told Mr. Cole that there was probably no danger and nothing to worry about, he might lose a good fee.

"Yes," he nodded, "I remember reading something about this—er—Scarlet X. The account, I believe, hinted that a wealthy man whose name has for the moment escaped me——"

"Louis Leighton," Tom Medbury supplied quickly. "The Scarlet X killed Leighton when he ignored demands to pay back money that he had mulcted from investors in Universal Oil. The

Scarlet X went after him first because he was head of the swindle. Leighton ignored the demands, and he was killed.

"If The Scarlet X is a myth, Mr. Faulkner, why did the five men associated with Leighton in that swindle pay back the money? Ah, you can't answer that!"

Faulkner couldn't, so he just ignored it and turned to Roger Cole. "What do you think about it?" he asked. "You, I can see, don't take much stock in The Scarlet X business."

"You're mighty right I don't," retorted the tire manufacturer. "Scarlet X—poof! Those letters were sent to me by a man named Chester Waldron who used to work in my plant. A girl who works in my office knows something about it—a girl who's in love with Waldron. She's one of the office stenographers. No doubt she wrote it—just a scheme to scare me into coughing up some money. Do I look like the sort of man who can be scared into doing anything?"

"You do not." Detective Faulkner answered positively, and glanced down at the typewritten letter again. "Does this stenographer of yours use a Marlin typewriter?"

Cole did not quite understand the purpose of this question. "Not in my office," he answered; "I've just installed Cunningham typewriters in all departments. Why?"

"Because," answered Faulkner, "this letter was written on a new model Marlin. The reason I am so sure is that we've been working on a will case where there was a question of typewriting involved. The new model Marlin has a fat letter peculiar to itself. However that proves nothing; the girl might have a machine of her own at home, you know. If she was smart she wouldn't use one of your office machines anyhow. What would be the reason for Waldron and this girl to think that they would succeed in frightening you to give up money?"

Roger Cole shifted his cigar to the other side of his mouth. "I've recently secured patents on a new vulcanizing process that is going to mean big things for my factory. Cuts production costs way down, and it means a big expansion for my company. Chester Waldron claims that he invented the process; he even got up on the witness stand and testified that I promised him twenty thousand dollars for it.

"True enough, Faulkner, he did assist me with some of the experiments, but for him to claim invention—of course that's preposterous. Just to placate him, I offered him a thousand dollars, but he threw the money into my face and went to law about it.

"I won the suit and now, I suppose, having read that rot in the papers about The Scarlet X, he's trying to scare me into giving him twenty thousand dollars. The girl's in on it, that's certain; the look on her face when she saw me with this third letter was proof enough of that." Again Cole shifted his cigar.

"Where's Chester Waldron now?" inquired Faulkner.

"He's got a job with some company in New York."

"And this letter, the postmark shows, was mailed in New York," added the detective. "That's certainly a lead in his direction. Just what steps do you want the Faulkner agency to take?"

Roger Cole's face hardened. "I want you to get the goods on 'em, of course. What else? I want 'em sent to jail where they belong. Of course I know that I'm in no danger, but——"

"Don't be too certain of that, Mr. Cole," cautioned the detective. "A man suffering from the hallucination of—um—fancied wrong cannot be safely accounted for. There's no telling how far his insanity will drive him. I must insist that you be very careful; in fact that you have a shadow."

"A shadow?"

"Some one to follow you and keep an eye on your safety; a bodyguard, in short. It would be a serious reflection on my agency if something should—ah—happen to you while your case was in my hands."

A stupefied expression came into Cole's face; perhaps, too, a trace of fear.

"Great heavens man," he blurted out, "you—you don't think that Waldron would try to—to kill me?"

"There's no telling, and I certainly wouldn't let you chance it. I shall, of course, put two of my best men to work on the case at once. One of them will go to New York and keep an eye on Waldron. As the matter stands now, you only suspect that Waldron and the girl in your office are responsible for the three letters. Even if we proved they were responsible, there's no ground for action.

"This letter is most craftily worded. No money is demanded, no threats of death or even of physical harm are made. There is no reference whatever to any stolen invention; your own mind has supplied that suggestion."

Roger Cole flushed indignantly. "If you mean to intimate that I've got a guilty conscience——" he blustered out.

"Certainly not, Mr. Cole," soothingly replied Faulkner, although, in truth, he did entertain just such a suspicion. "But, what I am getting at is that you couldn't convict Waldron of anything even if you proved that he wrote the letter."

"Perhaps you're right," said Cole.

"And Chester Waldron isn't crafty," offered Tom Medbury. "He wouldn't have written a letter like that."

"My hunch is that Mary Nash wrote it," offered Roger Cole.

"Please listen to me for a minute," persisted Medbury. "This letter is in the same form as that The Scarlet X used in addressing Leighton's outfit of sharpers. It's my theory that Waldron's suit against Uncle Roger was brought to the attenion of The Scarlet X, that when Waldron failed to win in the courts The Scarlet X undertook to collect for him. Poo-poo all you want to, but my hunch is that we're up against the real Scarlet X."

Detecive Faulkner lifted his hand silencingly. "Gentlemen," he said, "there's nothing to be gained by idle speculation. There's just one thing to do, and that's for me to put my operatives to work and to protect you, Mr. Cole, against even the remotest possibility of physical danger.

"As I said before, Waldron, if he is the author of these letters, has violated no law. The threats are too carefully veiled. This letter says, 'You will be given just three days more.' So far you have ignored the matter, and if there is any intention to carry the threats further, they'll have to come out in the open within the next three days. Have no worry, Mr. Cole, my men will be protecting you, and——" The detective stopped abruptly at the startled look which came into Roger Cole's face.

He even trembled slightly.

The tire manufacturer had reached into the side pocket of his coat for his handkerchief. His fingers touched the stiff paper of an envelope, and he never carried papers in the side pocket of his coat. He drew it forth, and his hand trembled slightly as his eyes stared, widening, at identically the same sort of square envelope that lay on Detective Faulkner's desk. For a moment his sagging jaw was helpless of speech; a sudden perspiration oozed from the pores of his forehead as he stared at the neatly typewritten address, this time reading merely:

"Mr. Roger Cole, Personal."

"Great heavens!" he whispered hoarsely. "It—it's another one! I—I found the thing in my pocket!"

In the upper right-hand corner of the envelope was a neat X in red ink.

CHAPTER III.

BLACKMAIL NOW.

IT is quite true that Detective Faulkner's profession was one calculated to make him hardened to surprises, but he leaped up from his desk and took a step forward, reaching out an imperative hand for the envelope. Cole's nephew, too, had bounded up from his chair, his eyes bulging.

There is nothing quite so terrifying as the things we cannot understand, and terror had clutched a sudden and icy hand about Roger Cole's heart.

"How—how did that get into my pocket?" he muttered thickly. "That's what I want to know. How did it get into my pocket?"

"It bears out my contention," whispered Tom Medbury; "it's not Chester Waldron or Mary Nash. It's The Scarlet X!"

Faulkner was opening the envelope; swiftly he read:

MR. ROGER COLE: In re Debt of Justice Number Twelve.

This communication is being delivered to you by personal messenger. We beg to advise you that your visit to the detective agency is utterly futile and automatically voids our agreement to allow you three days of grace.

As your conscience is well aware, the amount due on our Debt of Justice Number Twelve is twenty thousand dollars, and we shall expect payment in full, plus our collection charge of ten per cent—total, twenty-two thousand dollars—before midnight tomorrow, the 16th.

Our instructions for payment are as follows:

You will go alone to Rouse's Inlet, where you will find an abandoned fisherman's shanty. You will bring with you twenty-two thousand dollars in bills of one thousand dollars' denomination.

Failure will be exceedingly unwise. No debtor has yet escaped. X.

"We've got 'em now!" Faulkner exclaimed triumphantly. "We've got 'em out in the open where we want 'em. Clever wording or not, it's blackmail now."

Roger Cole, slumped forward in his chair and dabbing at his damp face with his handkerchief, had not yet recovered from his alarmed daze. "What I want to know is how did that letter get into my pocket?" he questioned helplessly.

"Twenty thousand, eh?" went on the detective. "That's the amount Chester Waldron sued you for, the amount he claims is due him from your vulcanizing patent. That makes it pretty clear in my mind that Waldron is the man behind these letters."

"Of course," replied Roger Cole crossly. "Any fool would know that, but what I want to know is how was this last letter sneaked into my pocket?"

"That's important," agreed Faulkner and sat down at his desk again. "We ought to be able to get at the bottom of that rather quickly. The girl in your office, Mary Nash, I believe you said her name was, probably slipped it into your pocket. She overheard your plan to consult me, wrote the letter, and——"

"You forget, Mr. Faulkner," interrupted Tom Medbury, "that you have told us that letter number three was written on a Marlin typewriter. As my uncle told you, we've only Cunninghams in the factory office; unless the letter which my uncle has just found in his pocket was written on a Cunningham, any theory that she wrote it won't hold water."

"A point well taken," admitted Faulkner, a trifle nettled that he should have been picked up so neatly. He swiftly compared the typing of the two Scarlet X letters and nodded. "Both were written on the same machine—a Marlin." This left him for the moment high and dry.

"I don't see how Mary Nash could have put the letter in my pocket," grumbled Roger Cole, "and I don't understand how she could have known that I intended coming to see you. It's—it's uncanny!"

"Perhaps if you will describe your

movements in detail," suggested the detective, "we may be able to find something that will give us a clew."

The tire manufacturer was silent for a moment, marshaling his thoughts as methodically as possible considering the strain he was under.

"I got to the office a few minutes after nine," he began slowly, trying to omit no detail of his movements. "I hadn't settled down to work when my nephew came in with the third letter. Then Mary Nash brought in some letters for my signature, and that's when I knew by her face that she was in on this Scarlet X business. Caught her staring at the letter on my desk like she was half scared out of her wits.

"It was after she left that my nephew and I talked of coming to you; Tom was for turning it over to the police."

"She might have been listening outside the door," commented Faulkner. "That would be a natural thing for her to do if she has knowledge of these threats."

"Her desk is near the door," admitted Cole, "but I thought that door was practically sound proof."

"You talked pretty loud, Uncle Roger," said Medbury. "It's reasonable to suppose she might have caught some of the conversation that passed between you and me, but what stumps me is how she got word to—well, I suppose both of you are more willing to admit now that there may be a real Scarlet X."

"Please proceed with an account of your movements up to the time you reached my office," requested the detective.

"About ten-thirty I took a turn through the factory to see how things were running. Then I returned to the office where I stayed until noon. Then Tom and I motored to Bayside Inn for lunch. We came directly from the inn to New Haven. That's all, I believe."

"My theory," offered Medbury, "is that the letter was slipped into Uncle Roger's pocket after we reached New Haven. We parked the car about two blocks from here and walked the rest of the way. The streets were rather crowded, and there would have been ample opportunity for some one to have brushed against Uncle Roger and to have slipped the envelope into his coat. It couldn't very well have been Waldron for we would have recognized him, and Waldron wouldn't have taken a long chance like that. I stick to it that we're up against the real and genuine Scarlet X."

"It's a puzzler," admitted Detective Faulkner. "Waldron must have the girl and some third person working with him on this thing. The girl got the information and managed to send word in time for the fourth letter to be typewritten." He frowned heavily, chewing savagely at his cigar, which had long since gone dead. "First, I'll send one of my men to New York, and have him trail Waldron. I'd better send another operative to your office to have a look at this Mary Nash, so that he can watch her. I'll also have him examine your private office to see if a dictagraph has been planted somewhere in the room.

"Now, Mr. Cole, I want you to listen to me closely and follow my instructions to the letter. I want you to go to the bank to-morrow morning with your check for twenty-two thousand dollars; get it in one-thousand-dollar bills."

Roger Cole looked up protestingly, but Faulkner silenced him.

"No, don't interrupt me, Mr. Cole. We're up against a clever scheme and no mistake. Some one may be following you just as they followed you to New Haven this afternoon; if that's the case, I want them to see you getting the actual cash at the bank. Understand?

"On your return from the bank I want you to have a talk with your nephew. I want you to pretend you're badly scared and have decided to ac-

cept the terms; that you've ignored my advice to bluff it out. Get me? Disarm suspicion in case of eavesdropping.

"Then to-morrow night we'll pull off the big show. You drive to Rouse's Inlet—alone as per instructions, a package of currency in your pocket, and——"

"What!" gasped out Roger Cole, aghast. "You want me to make that trip alone, with twenty-two thousand dollars cash in my pocket? I'll do no such thing!"

Faulkner smiled sagely. "Well, hardly," he granted. "With what might be twenty-two thousand dollars but isn't. You see, Cole, we'll make up a dummy package with twenty-two dollar bills instead of one-thousand-dollar bills. My men will precede you to Rouse's Inlet and be lying in wait. I will personally be in charge. We're going to catch 'em in their own trap, that's all."

"It sounds all right, but I don't believe it'll work," spoke up Tom Medbury, shaking his head. "The Scarlet X isn't going to be caught by any such simple, worn-out scheme as that."

"When you get an idea you stick to it like grim death, young fellow," said Faulkner; "can't budge you from the notion that there's a sure-enough Scarlet X, huh?"

"Why did Louis Leighton's associates pay back the money they got from the Universal Oil swindle?" retorted Medbury. "That's what clinches it with me. I hope I'm wrong, but——"

"I wish I knew how that fourth letter got into my pocket," broke in Roger Cole, his voice jerky. He was, perhaps, afraid of no living man on earth whom he could meet, face to face, but these hints of a mysterious, unknown vengeance, now given force by the uncanny appearance of this last letter, had begun to disturb him. "Confound it, Faulkner, do you suppose my nephew's right, and that there is such a thing as this Scarlet X?"

"Rome wasn't built in a day, and a mystery like this can't be solved in a minute," answered the detective. This was an adapted quotation that he liked the sound of, and which he was in the habit of offering to clients who pressed him for explanations that he was unable to give. "Don't worry, Mr. Cole; my agency will give you ample protection, and to-morrow night we'll have the author of these letters where we want 'im. That's in jail."

"I hope so, Faulkner, I hope so," Cole said fervently, but his tone was not overly optimistic.

CHAPTER IV.

PREPARED FOR THE TRIP.

IT was the following afternoon, and Roger Cole had made a hurried trip to Bayside Inn, at the invitation of Faulkner to discuss the final plans for the trap which was to be sprung that night. Faulkner had arrived ahead of him and waited in one of the private dining rooms on the second floor.

The tire manufacturer had a haggard look which told of a sleepless night. He slumped down into a chair with a tired sigh that was half a groan.

"Oh, come now, Cole," remonstrated the detective, "you mustn't let this thing get on your nerves in such a fashion. You're in no danger; one of my operatives is shadowing you, and——"

"As if I didn't know that!" the manufacturer answered snappily. "That pest of yours on the motor cycle has been put-putting behind me everywhere I go. He hangs on my trail like grim death."

"One of the best shadows in the business," vouchsafed Faulkner. "He's made sure so far that no one is following you but himself, but it's better to play safe."

"That girl, Mary Nash, didn't show up for work this morning," said Cole. "She phoned that she was sick."

"I am aware of that fact," admitted

the detective. "We're keeping tabs on Miss Mary Nash—darn pretty girl, I'm told."

"It looks suspicious, her staying away," said the manufacturer.

"Sure it does, especially since she wasn't too sick to get the ten o'clock train for New York this morning. It's dollars to doughnuts that she'll see Chester Waldron."

"Get any trace of Waldron?"

"Sure," replied Faulkner; "Halsey sent me a wire about an hour ago. Want a look at it?" He tossed over the telegram and Roger Cole read:

FAULKNER AGENCY, 202 Stringer Building, New Haven, Connecticut.

Waldron at his place of employment all day yesterday. Spent the evening at public library. HALSEY.

"That makes it certain, of course," observed Faulkner, "that it wasn't Waldron who put the fourth letter into your pocket. Since you're so sure the Nash girl didn't have a chance to do it, it means there's a third person in on the scheme."

Roger Cole stared at the detective almost pleadingly. "On the square, Faulkner," he demanded, "do you take any stock in this Scarlet X business?"

"No, I don't, Mr. Cole. I've been mulling it over in my mind and got the old newspaper files to read up on the case. It's my notion that Waldron has just copied the idea, trying to frighten you into coming across with the money. He asks for two thousand dollars more than the twenty thousand dollars and that extra two thousand dollars is no doubt to be the bit of the third confederate." He paused to light a fresh cigar. "Now let's talk over the plan of nabbing our birds. Have you followed my instructions?"

"Yes," replied the manufacturer, tapping his breast pocket. "I've got the money right here—twenty-two thousand dollars in one-thousand-dollar bills that I drew from the bank this morning."

Faulkner whistled. "That's a lot of money to be packing around," he said. "Why didn't you put it in your safe at the office? Or send your cashier back to the bank with it for redeposit?"

Cole stirred uncomfortably. "Well," he explained, "the truth is, Faulkner, that I got to thinking it would be better to take the real money along with me. If Waldron or Waldron's agent should be at the deserted shack when I arrive and discover that I'd brought a dummy package——"

"That they might bump you off, eh?" finished the detective. "No chance of that, Mr. Cole. I've got my wires too well laid for that. And there's mighty small chance of the 'collector' being there to meet you; that isn't the way these blackmailers work. They'll wait for you to leave the money and go away; they'll be lurking outside in the darkness to make sure you've gone. Then, when they've waited until it seems sure the coast is clear, they'll go to the shack to collect the money. Take my advice and get that small fortune off your person."

"All right," agreed Cole, "I'll put it in my safe at the office."

"Now," proceeded Faulkner, "I'll tell you how I've arranged the trap. Two of my men go to Rouse's Inlet this afternoon in a roundabout way. They go to the next village, pose as fishermen, and hire a boat; then, with darkness, they slip up to that old pier at Rouse's Inlet, from the water side. Another operative and I will go out ahead of you on the road, leave the machine, and creep up on foot.

"You, Mr. Cole, will follow the instructions and go to the shack alone."

"I don't like that 'alone' business," protested Cole. "My nephew and I thought it would be a good idea for him to go along with me, armed. Tom isn't much of a business man, but he's got one thing and that's nerve. He wouldn't have to be seen in the car; he

could even hide on the floor of the tonneau with a robe thrown over him."

Faulkner quickly dissented to this plan. "You've handed me the job of landing these blackmailers, and I can't agree to anything that might scare 'em off. I can't agree to you taking your nephew with you on that trip to-night. You've got to go alone. As soon as you've left the package, you can drive on home. You're safe enough, for three of my men, as well as myself, will be within a few yards of the shack. I went out there and looked over the ground by daylight this morning. There are half a dozen places for us to hide while we're waiting to nab 'em."

Roger Cole was not overly enthusiastic, but the detective's tone was so positive that he felt a slight relief.

The two men discussed the night's plan in more detail, and Cole agreed to it. After all, why hire an expert unless you are willing to listen to his advice? Sam Faulkner was a detective and a pretty good detective at that; not very imaginative, but his judgment had been seasoned in a long and hard school of experience and, leaving him to the beaten path of sleuthing, he filled the bill. He had handled some rather important cases and usually gave satisfaction to his clients.

It was decided that Cole, after returning to his office and putting the twenty-two thousand dollars in his private safe, should go to his home in Westfields, which was some four miles from the tire factory at Roxton, have dinner as usual and, shortly after darkness closed down, get into his machine and motor to Rouse's Inlet with the dummy package of currency.

"Now quit worrying, Mr. Cole," urged Faulkner by way of parting. "Just keep remembering that three of my best operatives as well as myself, all armed and prepared to protect you, will be within calling distance of that deserted shack. With such safeguards you are in no danger; the Faulkner Agency has never bungled a job yet."

Less than an hour later Roger Cole was back at the factory. Tom Medbury, his nephew, had been out in the plant when Faulkner had telephoned, otherwise he might have accompanied him. On his return, Medbury was again absent from his desk, trying to trace an order that seemed to have gone astray.

Cole went into his private office and closed the door. His first act was to open the square, squat safe to which only himself had access and which, as a general thing, accommodated only private papers. He took the packet of thousand-dollar bills from his pocket and thrust them into one of the compartments, but a feeling of uneasiness seized him. This safe, he told himself, was far from burglar proof; any yeggman worthy of the name could open it in an hour, perhaps less.

"No sense in taking chances," he said to himself, as he took the money out again, closed the safe door, and, glancing about the room, smiled shrewdly as he thrust the sheaf of bills behind one of the framed photographs of Cole tires which adorned the walls.

A few minutes later, Tom Medbury, coming from the shipping department, saw the big touring car at the side of the office entrance and knew that his uncle had returned. He paused for a moment at his own desk to toss down a sheaf of papers that he had carried in his hand, and then he made for his uncle's sanctum.

Roger Cole was sitting in his swivel chair, stacks of undisposed-of business piled high in front of him. He found work difficult under the circumtances.

"Where'd you disappear to?" demanded Medbury.

"Faulkner called me up and asked me to meet him to talk things over. Mary Nash caught the ten o'clock train for New York to meet Chester Waldron, most likely."

"What about to-night, Uncle Roger?"

"Just as Faulkner told us yesterday; no change in the plans, Tom."

The nephew reached into his pocket and produced a stubby automatic which he balanced in the palm of his hand.

"They won't get you, Uncle Roger, unless they get me first," he promised grimly. "I'm prepared for the trip."

Cole shook his head. "I'd a lot rather you were going along," he said, "but Faulkner's set his foot down on that—hard. Afraid it'll scare 'em off; I've got to follow instructions and go out to that place alone."

"What!" exclaimed Medbury. "Faulkner insists on that? He's going to let you drive alone over those country roads with more than twenty thousand dollars in your pocket? That's what I call a rotten piece of detective work. If that's the kind of protection you're going to have, The Scarlet X has a cinch."

"Now you see here, Tom, I don't want to hear any more of that Scarlet X business. Besides which, young man, I'm not going to be carrying that money with me. Faulkner vetoed that and told me to put the money in the safe. I'm to take along a dummy package."

An expression of relief came into the nephew's face. "Oh, I see," he said quietly, with a glance at the safe in the corner; "perhaps that's best." He handed the gun to his uncle. "Since I'm not going along, I think you'd better take this."

CHAPTER V.

AT ROUSE'S INLET.

IT was a twenty-mile drive from Cole's home in Westfields to Rouse's Inlet, and it was a night of blustering darkness, heavy clouds blanketing the face of the moon. The tire manufacturer crouched low in his seat, his hands frozen tightly about the steering wheel, sending the powerful car over the road at a good forty miles an hour.

The car's headlights cut big holes in the blackness, but at either side there were dancing shadows, every one of them seeming to hold possibility of menace. Grotesque shapes formed themselves ominously only to fall behind harmlessly.

What if he should be halted before he reached the inlet, an obstruction in the road that would force him to a stop, a masked man with drawn gun ordering him to stand and deliver? Queer that Faulkner had overlooked that possibility; it would be a clever stroke in keeping with the sneaking of the Scarlet X letter into his pocket. His mind magnified this possibility until he expected a hold-up at each curve. What would happen when they searched him and found that he had not brought along the money? Although the air was chill, perspiration stood out on his forehead in an agony of apprehension.

Roger Cole began to curse himself for a fool, a greedy fool who had let avarice get the better of him. He told himself that he should have given Chester Waldron what he had promised him for the new vulcanizing process. When that third letter had come he should have settled with Waldron on the best possible terms without turning the matter over to the detective agency.

The car roared on through the night; it was too late now to turn back. Suddenly his foot jammed down on the brake pedal and a shout rose in his throat; the headlights had revealed an obstruction across the road—a red lantern suspended from a piece of lumber set on top of two cement barrels. The brakes screamed and the powerful car slackened speed. And then Roger Cole laughed mirthlessly. It was merely a spot where the thoroughfare was being repaired. He fed the gas again and went on, his nerves torn almost to shreds.

Another five miles and the road veered to the right, leading down to

Long Island Sound and Rouse's Inlet. Five minutes more and he would reach the deserted shack with its promise of lurking danger. Cole slackened speed again as if to delay the ordeal of facing it, wishing that he had ignored Faulkner's instructions and had brought his nephew along.

The paved roadway ended and the wheels jounced over a rutted surface; here progress was necessarily cautious. At last the road stopped entirely, what might have once been its continuation blocked by a pile of débris. The tire manufacturer stopped the machine, shut off the engine, and reluctantly slid his ample proportions from under the steering wheel. The automobile headlights showed him the rotting pier ahead and, a little to one side, the gloomy outlines of the abandoned shack where he must go to deposit the fake packet of currency.

His hand went to his pocket, clutching about the butt of the automatic pistol that his nephew had given him. That had been thoughtful of Tom, he thought. He paused beside the car, straining his eyes through the inky blackness as he wondered at what precise points of vantage Faulkner and his men were waiting. He hoped they were close.

Taking a firmer grip on the gun and releasing the safety catch so that it would be ready for instant service, Roger Cole began to creep forward. The wind was blowing strong from across the sound, and beneath the pier the water was lapping with monotonous rhythm at the decaying timbers which supported the structure.

At last he approached the shack with its sagging door, creaking plaintively on its rusty hinges as the eerie fingers of the wind moved it back and forth. With a groaning profanity on his lips Roger Cole wavered at the entrance, stygian darkness ahead of him, listening for any warning sound of movement within. Then, the gun raised a few inches from his side, he took a step forward. Part of the wooden flooring had sagged sharply to the center and the manufacturer, losing his balance, staggered forward and went to his knees.

Bang! In the fall his finger had tightened about the trigger of the automatic and the weapon roared almost deafeningly within the narrow confines of the one-room structure. There were pattering sounds as terrified water rats, nesting within the shack, scampered to safety.

Faulkner and his men, lying in wait, leaped forward from their places of concealment, dashing toward the shack. The head of the detective agency was startled and apprehensive.

"I'd take my oath, chief," shouted Peters, one of his men, that nobody came to the place in the last two hours. Reckon they've bumped off Cole?"

"Shut up and come on," said Faulkner grimly, whipping out a police-regulation forty-five. Two other operatives, closing in from the opposite direction, met them at the shack, just as Roger Cole, the automatic hanging limply at his side, staggered out into the open.

"You all right, Mr. Cole?" demanded Faulkner. "Who did that shooting?"

"I—I did," gasped out the tire manufacturer. "I—I stumbled and the darn thing went off by accident."

Sam Faulkner swore eloquently. "That's a fine mess you've made of things!" he roared angrily. "You've let 'em know we had a trap for 'em; you've scared 'em off. Not a chance in the world now, after a blunder like this. We might as well go on home. Why the devil didn't I tell you not to carry a gun; I might have known that you'd be shooting at the first shadow you saw."

Roger Cole fingered the dummy package in his pocket—twenty-two marked one-dollar bills.

"Do—do you think I'd better leave this?"

Faulkner laughed shortly. "What for —rat food?" he retorted sarcastically. "Good heavens, man, you ought to have sense enough to know that our quarry'll never come within miles of this place now. You've sure queered the game for us."

"I wonder what they'll do now?" muttered Roger Cole.

"Probably make your life miserable by sending you more of those scarlet X letters," snapped Faulkner, thoroughly disgusted; "however they might—um—take a more violent course than that. Might, you understand."

The manufacturer shivered. "Mighty sorry, Faulkner," he said humbly, "but I stumbled in the dark. I—I wish you'd go home with me, Faulkner, in case—in case——"

"I understand," replied the detective. "Yes, that'll be safer. Peters, you drive my car on back to New Haven, and I'll ride to Westfields with Cole. I'll spend the night there; if I'm wanted for anything, I can be reached there on the phone. Come on, Cole, let's be going. No sense wasting any more time here at Rouse's Inlet."

A few minutes later, Faulkner beside him, Roger Cole was driving back to Westfields. Struggling to contain his indignation the detective was silent. Naturally Cole was chagrined that the trap should have failed and that the menace remained, but this feeling was tempered with a relief that he was getting back from Rouse's Inlet with a whole skin. At least that was over with. He breathed a sigh of thankfulness.

Roger Cole was a widower and, except for his nephew, had no relatives. Tom Medbury lived with him in the roomy, three-story house at Westfields which Cole continued to occupy after the death of his wife some five years previous. There were three servants: Mrs. Pennyfeather, the housekeeper, Nora White, the cook, and Thompson who did a bit of gardening, cared for the furnace in winter, and made himself generally useful.

Still fuming at the miscarriage of his carefully laid plan, Sam Faulkner got out of the car at the garage, but before Cole could run the car inside Tom Medbury dashed from the house to the driveway, coming toward them at a dead run.

"Wait, Uncle Roger!" he shouted. "Don't put the car up yet. Something has happened at the office. The Roxton police just telephoned a minute ago. Lippert, the watchman, was found knocked out, and the safe—the one in your private office—has been robbed."

"Great heavens," gasped Detective Faulkner. "They've beaten us after all; Cole, they've gotten your twenty-two thousand dollars!"

Throwing in the reverse gear and backing the car around for a swift dash to the factory, Roger Cole smiled grimly as he thought of the twenty-two thousand-dollar bills that he had put behind the picture. That bit of shrewdness had saved him twenty-two thousand dollars.

CHAPTER VI.

COLE WILL PAY.

WHEN the three men, Cole, Faulkner, and Medbury reached the plant of the tire company, lights were burning in the office building, and, as the motor swept up to the entrance, Lieutenant Fennel of the Roxton police came out to meet them. Cole got out of the machine and, followed by the other two, hurried up the steps.

"Hello, Mr. Cole," said the police officer. "You didn't lose any time getting here, I'll say. Your watchman's just recovering consciousness." Then he saw the New Haven private detective. "How'd you happen along, Faulkner?"

"I've been working on a private matter for Mr. Cole," answered Faulkner. "Watchman made a statement yet?"

"Not yet; he's just coming around.

He got a nasty clout on the head. The doctor thought he was fatally injured. The safe's been robbed, all right; not the big one, but the little fellow in the private office. Have anything of value in it, Mr. Cole?"

"Did he?" put in Faulkner. "I'll say he did; twenty-two thousand in thousand-dollar bills."

Lieutenant Fennel whistled.

"Gosh, that's some haul!" he exclaimed.

Roger Cole shook his head. "You're wrong, Faulkner," he explained. "The twenty-two thousand dollars wasn't in the safe after all. You see, it isn't much of a safe; never kept anything in it except some private papers, so I—well, I found another hiding place which seemed to be, and was, more secure. I don't imagine there's much loss and—um—well, for strictly private reasons, Lieutenant Fennel, I'd rather you made no official report of this matter. Don't you think, Faulkner, that it would be better to keep it quiet under the circumstances?"

"Absolutely," agreed Faulkner. "You see, lieutenant, there may be some connection between this attempted robbery and the private investigation that I'm working on."

"I'll think about that," returned Lieutenant Fennel, a little miffed that he should not be taken into full confidence. "If somebody's being protected——"

"Not at all," Faulkner hastened to reassure him. "We'll get around to the other matter presently. We ought to hear what the watchman has to say; if he can give us any sort of description it may help in getting on the right trail. How did you know there was anything wrong out here at the tire factory?"

"The watchmen at all of the Roxton factories report over phone to the police every hour, just as our patrolmen do. Lippert is a particularly methodical fellow, and when he didn't ring in at ten o'clock the switchboard operator reported it to me. I knew something must be wrong, so out we came—Patrolman Harper and I.

"We found the watchman in the outer office, knocked out from a nasty blow that had caught him on the side of the head. Here's what did the trick." He exhibited a heavy metal paper weight, made into a miniature Cole tire which had been gotten up for advertising purposes. "No finger prints on it, Faulkner, so the man evidently wore gloves. No crook with an ounce of brains ever leaves his finger prints behind him these days.

"The door between the outer office and Mr. Cole's private office was wide open, and we saw that the safe had been ransacked. That's all I know."

Watchman Lippert was slumped in a chair, still not more than half conscious, with a bandage wound about the scalp wound which had knocked him out. Doctor Wheeler, a Roxton physician, was giving the man a drink of brandy.

"He's coming around all right, lieutenant," said the doctor. "He'll be able to give you a statement in another minute or so. Feel like talking now, Lippert?"

The watchman, responding to the effect of the liquor, sat more erect but held his hands to his head as if he were suffering pain.

"I feel more like layin' my hands on the murderin' crook what handed me that haymaker," he mumbled. "It's murder an' none less that he was bent on."

"What did he look like?" demanded Lieutenant Fennel eagerly.

"That an' I couldn't tell you, sir," answered Lippert. "Not so much as a look did I get at the murderin' scoundrel. Y'see, gents, I was makin' my rounds when I heard a tap-tappin'—mighty faint it was—comin' from out of the office buildin'. First I thought it was my ears playin' a trick on me, an' yet I says to myself that it has the sound of a typewriter."

Lieutenant Fennel snorted derisively. "A yegg wouldn't waste any time fooling with a typewriter," he said shortly, yet as he glanced across the room he saw that one of the writing machines was uncovered. Detective Faulkner and Roger Cole exchanged quick glances, each of them knowing that, in the light of this story from the watchman, they would find somewhere about the office another letter signed with a scarlet X. The tire manufacturer shuddered slightly.

"The shades was down an' they fit tight," went on Lippert. "I couldn't be sure there was a light burning inside. If it was it was sort of shaded like. The tap-tappin' had stopped as I come closer, an' creepin' up the steps to the front door I didn't hear nothin'. I tries the door an' finds it locked tight as a drum. Sure, I tells myself, it's old that I'm gettin', an' hearin' things. But to make sure I unlocks the door with my key. Dark as a dungeon it was. An' then somethin' hits me on the head."

"Didn't have so much as a look at him, eh?" demanded Lieutenant Fennel.

"Nary a peek at 'im, lieutenant; the murderin' crook must have been just inside the door, ready to swat me."

"The shades are not drawn down at night," spoke up Cole's nephew. "The man who opened the safe must have done that to keep the watchman from seeing the light!"

"Let's have a look at the safe," suggested Detective Faulkner.

"It was opened with the combination," said Lieutenant Fennel. "That makes it look like an inside job. Mr. Cole, who has the combination to the safe besides yourself?"

"No one," answered the tire manufacturer; "no one except myself." He was heading toward the open door of the private office. "The lights are on full blast."

"I snapped 'em on for a look around," said Lieutenant Fennel. "Both rooms were dark when I got here, but the front door was unlocked."

Roger Cole looked at the open safe; his private papers had been pulled out and scattered over the floor in what seemed to have been a frenzy of haste. He glanced at the top of his flat-top desk and, although he had expected this very thing, gave a start as he saw the square envelope with his name typewritten in the center. Tom Medbury saw it at the same time, and he reached out gripping the sleeve of his uncle's coat.

"Look!" he whispered. "There's something!"

"Not so loud, young man," Detective Faulkner said in a tone low enough to escape the ears of the Roxton police lieutenant. "I don't want Fennel mixing in on this end of the business; he might gum the cards for me."

Roger Cole picked up the envelope, tore loose the flap with nervous fingers, and read:

> We deemed it advisable, in the light of the plan arranged by your detective, not to keep the appointment at Rouse's Inlet.
>
> Our collector is, instead, visiting your office.

It was signed with a scarlet X underneath which was a postscript, written on a different writing machine, unquestionably the one in the outer office, adding:

> P. S. Since an examination of your safe denies our hope of being able to credit our Debt of Justice account Number Twelve as paid, we are forced to execute our only alternative in such cases.

There was no definite threat, but Roger Cole's face blanched and the blood chilled in his veins, for he was very certain that "our only alternative" meant just one thing, and that was death! He felt that there was no escape, that the brains behind those letters was unbeatable. They could get their messages into a man's pockets, they could unlock his office and open a safe to which he alone had the combination; and in some mysterious manner

they had discovered that Faulkner had baited a trap for them at Rouse's Inlet.

The tortured man stared at the open door of the safe, wishing fervently that he had put the money there instead, in a flash of shrewdness, of placing it behind the picture. He dropped heavily into a chair, his hands clenched, his cheeks a mottled gray.

"I'll pay!" he muttered. "I'll pay!" But even this surrender was hopeless for he had no way of sending word to this thing which signed itself with a scarlet X. Faulkner stood beside him, having taken the letter from his palsied fingers while Tom Medbury, standing on tiptoe that he might look over the latter's shoulder, likewise read the typewritten message. Cole reached up, clutching the detective's sleeve in an imploring gesture.

"Don't let them get me, Faulkner," he begged hoarsely. "Tom's right, and we were both wrong; there's a real Scarlet X, and it's more devil than man. Protect me, Faulkner; save me from this thing!" Bluffer and blusterer that he had always been, Roger Cole's nerve was gone.

CHAPTER VII.

FAULKNER BLUNDERS.

IT was a few minutes of midnight, and Roger Cole was home again. He sat in the library, with its old-fashioned walnut wainscoting, crouching in the corner of the fireplace as if, in the shadows, he hoped to hide himself from what he feared. A few minutes before he had gone into the den for a bottle of liquor; he was not ordinarily a tippler, but he was feeling badly in need of a bracer.

Tom Medbury, sitting across the room, found it hard to believe that this terrified man was the same dominating and domineering uncle with whom he had lived during the past five years. All the force was gone out of the heavy, rugged face.

Sam Faulkner, hands rammed deep into his trouser pockets, was turning about the room in short, jerky strides as he grappled with what was the most amazing set of circumstances that he had ever encountered. While he was not ready to admit that there really existed a Scarlet X such as had been conceived in the columns of *The New York Sphere,* he could not deny that he was up against a weirdly clever antagonist.

"I don't believe I'd hit that liquor too hard, Mr. Cole," he suggested as the tire manufacturer reached for the bottle again, not less than the fifth time. "Brace up, man; no harm can come to you if we're careful enough. I've been thrashing this business out in my mind, and nothing has happened but what can be explained logically.

"Of course we know that Chester Waldron was in New York yesterday at the time of the fourth Scarlet X note was slipped into your pocket. Since that letter had to be written on a typewriter outside of your office, that makes it certain in my mind that Mary Nash was listening outside the door and overheard your plan to visit me. She telephoned to this confederate of theirs. It's not such a difficult thing, slipping a letter into a man's pocket in a crowd. Nothing uncanny about that, huh?

"My men are trailing both Waldron and the Nash girl; that makes it certain that Waldron isn't the chap who opened your safe and knocked out your watchman."

"I know that," muttered Cole; "I'm not afraid of Chester Waldron or a dozen like him. What I'm afraid of is——"

"Is the mystery of it," interrupted Faulkner, "and in my opinion that's the object of the whole business. Whoever is in on this scheme with Waldron certainly knows the psychology of fear and is working it for all it's worth.

"You're overwhelmed by the fact that Scarlet X seems to be a superman; he's nothing of the sort; only a very

clever man. How did he get into the office without jimmying the door? Don't you suppose that in the three years Waldron worked for you he had a key to the office?"

"Yes, Waldron had a key to the office," admitted Cole; "he used to work after hours when he was—er—helping me work out that new vulcanizing process."

"And, having a key," went on Faulkner, "what more simple than for him to turn the key over to this confederate? That leaves the safe. The combination is a simple one, and it's not so amazing that it was opened with small difficulty." He walked to a chair and sat down.

"The big thing in my mind," said Cole's nephew, "is to figure out how The Scarlet X knew a trap had been laid at Rouse's Inlet and, even bigger than that, how they knew that Uncle Roger might have the money in the safe. Unless some of your men talked too much——"

The detective flushed indignantly at this suggestion. "My men knew nothing about that," he retorted. "I told your uncle to put the money in the safe rather than carry that much cash on his person, but you don't suppose that I'm fool enough to go around announcing such information! So far as I know, only your uncle and myself knew that it was planned to put those bills in his office safe."

"I knew it," said Medbury; "but, naturally, I didn't talk either. That being the case, how do you explain it?"

"By applying common sense," replied Faulkner. "While my man who was shadowing Mr. Cole on the motorcycle made sure that he was not being followed, it's quite possible that Waldron's confederate was waiting for him to show up at the bank and saw him draw the money out.

"How did they know that we were to plant a trap for 'em at Rouse's Inlet? Common sense would tell 'em that's what would be done after Mr. Cole consulted a detective agency. The ordinary type of blackmailer might not figure it out so cleverly, but we're not dealing with the ordinary type. They just figured out what would be the logical thing for a detective to do—have Cole draw the money from the bank as a stall and make it appear that he was getting the cash to keep the appointment. They never had any intention of going to collect that money, feeling practically certain that it wouldn't be there.

"They probably kept watch and made sure that the money had not been returned to the bank. Then where was it? Where else but in Mr. Cole's safe? But he fooled them by not putting it in his private safe."

"I wish to Heaven I had," groaned Roger Cole; "they'd have the money, and I'd have peace of mind." He poured and gulped another glass of whisky. "I won't sleep a wink this night."

"Oh, yes you will," disagreed Faulkner; "the booze will take care of that for you. In fact, Mr. Cole, it's almost one o'clock, and I'm going to pack you off to bed right now—your nephew and I. Quit worrying; allowing yourself to be frightened is only playing into their hands. You're in no danger, but, for safety's sake, I'll keep guard downstairs to see that, as they used to say when I was a kid, 'the goblins don't get you.'"

Whether it was that the liquor had rekindled courage or whether Faulkner's reasoning had reassured him, Roger Cole seemed less agitated; perhaps it was that his terror had been somewhat benumbed by the fumes of alcohol. Anyway, he submitted to the detective's suggestion and got up from his chair, rather unsteady on his legs.

"Aw right, Faulkner," he muttered "if you think it's safe——"

"Of course it's safe, Mr. Cole. I'll make a round of the house to make sure that everything's locked, and I'll

be on guard right here in the library until daylight."

"That sounds reasonable enough, Uncle Roger," put in Tom Medbury. "In the library, here, Faulkner will be within view of the stairs, and this house doesn't boast of a servant's stairway. After all, even The Scarlet X isn't a ghost to pass through walls."

"Still sticking to that newspaper yarn, eh?" inquired Faulkner. "Well, let's be moving. I'll give your room the once-over, Mr. Cole, before you turn in."

The tire manufacturer's sleeping chamber was at the front of the house, and Faulkner, preceding his client within, snapped on the lights. Carrying caution to the utmost he examined the clothes closets to make certain that no hidden danger lurked there. Then he tested the windows to find them fastened.

"All right, Mr. Cole," he said, "you'll find it safe to turn in. You can lock the door after you if it'll give you any added feeling of security. Good night, and——"

"And pleasant dreams, I suppose," answered Roger Cole growlingly as he dropped to a chair and began to fumble with his shoe laces. "Pleasant dreams —huh!"

"Good night, Uncle Roger," added Tom Medbury. "I'd camp outside your door if I thought there was any actual danger, but I don't see how anything can happen now, Scarlet X or not."

"It's downright unkind of you, Medbury, to keep throwing that at him," complained Faulkner. "His nerves are gone as it is. You've got a right to your opinion, of course, no matter how ridiculous I may think it is, but you oughtn't to keep torturing him with it. I never saw a strong-willed man like your uncle go to pieces so quickly under a strain."

"I'm sorry," the nephew murmured contritely. "I didn't think of it like that. But I won't mention it again. I'd like to sit up and keep you company, but I'm just about all in myself. Good night, Mr. Faulkner; my roost is on the third floor."

The detective was halfway down the stairs when he turned back and tried the door of Cole's room. As quiet as he was about it a startled gasp came from the other side of the panel.

"All right, Mr. Cole," said Faulkner, "I just wanted to make sure that you'd locked yourself in."

He went downstairs again and, again carrying caution to the utmost, went from room to room making certain that the house was locked against intrusion. Then he returned to the library, took a modest nip from Roger Cole's bottle, went to the bookcase where he selected a book of a slightly intriguing title, turning off all the lights except a reading lamp on the table, and settled himself down to make the best of things.

The book was rather dull and an hour or so of reading began to make him drowsy. He tossed it aside, yawned, and settled back in his chair.

"Waldron's bound to meet that slick confederate of his some time," he told himself. "If my men keep on trailing Waldron and Mary Nash they're bound to pick up the trail. I'm bound to get 'em in time."

A mellow-toned French clock on the bookcase sounded the half hour and Faulkner yawned again and let his eyes close. He was not actually asleep, but certainly on the borderland of it, just enough to numb his consciousness, when the shot was fired.

Crack! One with a discerning ear for the sound of various firearms would have said that it was a rifle of small caliber. Crack! There came a second shot, followed by the rattle of splintered and falling glass. Crack!

Sam Faulkner was on his feet, a bewildered, stupefied alarm in his face. The sound of the shots seemed to be overhead, and that was where Roger Cole's room was!

The detective bounded to the stairs, knowing that he had blundered, that he had made the fatal mistake of minimizing the menace to his client. What had happened he did not know; it was alarming enough to know that something *had* happened.

As he reached the second-floor landing, doors were opening on the third. Cole's nephew came flying down the steps, clad in silk pajamas, bare of foot, hair tousled, his eyes wide and his face ghastly. Behind him, forgetting that her spare, gaunt frame was covered only by her flannel nightgown, crept Mrs. Pennyfeather, the housekeeper.

She looked hopelessly astonished.

"Those—those shots!" shouted Tom Medbury. "Great Heaven, Faulkner, they've got him; The Scarlet X has got him." His voice broke, rose to a hysterical pitch. "You're a devil of a detective, you are."

Sam Faulkner was pounding at the door; it was still locked from the inside.

"Cole!" he shouted. "Cole!" There was no answer.

"Some detective," Medbury jeered hotly. "It was you—you who made him think that he was safe, and made me think it, too. You're responsible for this, Faulkner; you——"

"Perhaps I've got it—coming to me," panted Faulkner, "but—help me break this door in. That's more important—now."

While Mrs. Pennyfeather, creeping a few steps lower, watched speechlessly, Faulkner and Medbury hurled themselves against the door. Three assaults were required before the lock snapped and they went plunging into the room.

Cole, evidently, had gone to sleep with the lights burning; he lay across the bed, a crimson stain widening about his chest and dyeing the sheet that covered him. There was another bullet wound in his forehead. One look was enough; the man was dead.

"The window—it's broken!" cried Tom Medbury. "Those shots were fired through the window. It looks out on the roof of the porch. You're responsible for this thing, Faulkner."

The detective, inwardly condemning himself bitterly, did not offer any excuse or defense. He was stooping to the floor for a square, white object which lay upon the carpet. It was the conventional gentleman's calling card. As he picked it up and turned it over in the palm of his hand he saw that it was blank except for the center of the reverse side where there was the signature of The Scarlet X.

CHAPTER VIII.

CAMERON APPEARS.

NEWS of the tragedy at Westfields, Connecticut, had barely managed to squeeze into the last editions of the New York morning papers—a few sketchy lines with the meagerest of details; although headlines had made the most of the sensation.

Mr. Vance Cameron, who lived in a bachelor apartment in the lower Eighties, just around the corner from Park Avenue, was sleeping soundly when Ruggles, in a high state of excitement, awakened him with almost rude insistence. Cameron blinked drowsily at the gray patch of the window and knew that it was far in advance of his usual rising time.

He stretched resentfully.

"Is the house on fire?" he demanded.

"It's the morning paper," said Ruggles, his voice tense. "I thought you'd better have a look at it."

Vance Cameron knew that Ruggles would not awaken him over an inconsequential trifle, so he sat up and reached out for the copy of *The Morning Sphere* which the man offered him. One glance at the bold-faced type and a low exclamation slipped through his lips. Screaming across the front page were the words:

RICH MANUFACTURER MURDERED

Then in smaller headlines underneath he read:

Mysterious Notes Signed the Scarlet X Sent to Roger Cole Before Death.

The account was brief, there having been insufficient time for reporters to ferret out colorful details. It said:

Roger Cole, wealthy manufacturer of automobile tires, was mysteriously shot to death in his home at Westfields, Connecticut, after midnight this morning by a rifle fired through a window, according to information telephoned to *The Sphere* by its Westfields correspondent.

Present in the house at the time was the head of a private detective agency at New Haven, who was guarding Mr. Cole's safety as, according to the slain man's nephew, the manufacturer had received a series of letters signed with a cross mark in red ink and which, according to the nephew's opinion is the signature of a mytserious organization which has been dubbed The Scarlet X.

Several months ago *The Sphere* published a lengthy account dealing with The Scarlet X.

On the floor of the room in which Mr. Cole was murdered was found a calling card bearing a Scarlet X.

Vance Cameron, a frown between his clear, gray eyes, tossed down the paper and slid his feet to the floor.

"Quick, Ruggles," he commanded; "the railway guide!"

Ruggles obeyed with alacrity, and a moment later Cameron was thumbing rapidly through the pages until he had the schedule which told him the time of departure of trains to Westfields. He glanced at the clock on the dresser.

"It's sixt-thirty now," he said briskly, "and the next train's nine o'clock. That means we take the machine; about sixty miles to Westfields. You get the car while I'm dressing."

"Quite right, sir," agreed Ruggles, his eyes sparkling in anticipation of interesting developments. I'll have the car below in seven minutes—no less."

"Make it ten if you wish, Ruggles," said Vance Cameron. He began to dress with an amazing speed. From the closet he took a suit of gray tweed and shoes that were rather more clumsy than he would have been expected to have a taste for.

Cameron was a tall, well-set man of thirty odd, well featured and vigorous of personality. Standing before the mirror in the bathroom with a square, metal box before him, his face yielded to the magic of his deft fingers until, in the passing of a few brief minutes, there seemed to be a totally different man looking out at him from the glass. A close-cropped mustache appeared on his upper lip; his eyebrows were expertly darkened so that there was no hint of artificiality; a clever little device, inserted in each nostril, widened his nose; a wart of flesh-colored wax was adhered firmly to his left cheek. Then he put on the coat of gray tweed with slightly padded shoulders which gave him an added breadth and made his entire body seem more bulky. After these changes it was doubtful if any but the most intimate acquaintance could have recognized him.

When Vance Cameron reached the street the car was waiting, Ruggles at the wheel. The latter exhibited no surprise at his employer's altered appearance, only nodded approvingly.

"You done a good job," he said as Cameron got into the seat beside him. "It's a most queer piece of business."

"It is that," admitted Cameron. The car slid forward, headed north. "Something tells me that we're up against quite a bit of cleverness."

"There's none of 'em so clever as you," said Ruggles with the sincerity of downright hero worship.

It takes a good man at the wheel to average forty miles an hour over all sorts of roads, good, bad, and indifferent, without getting a court summons from some zealous speed cop, but Ruggles was the sort of a driver who accomplished it. It was ten minutes after eight o'clock when they neared the out-

skirts of Westfields. Ruggles slackened speed.

"I suppose, sir, that you'll be wanting me to take the usual precautions?"

Vance Cameron nodded. "Of course," he answered. "It's such a simple matter to trace a car by its license plates, and this is a ticklish proposition, Ruggles; we've got to play our cards carefully."

Ruggles took from under the seat another set of New York license plates, changing them with those which belonged to the car. Then he took the wheel again.

CHAPTER IX.

DETECTIVE FAULKNER MEETS MR. MONTGOMERY.

HIS face haggard with the strain, Detective Faulkner was pacing the floor of the Cole library, waiting impatiently. Employed to protect a man from danger, he had let his client be murdered while he was on guard. Irreparable damage to the reputation of his agency.

Vance Cameron's car swept up the drive, and he got out briskly while Ruggles remained in his seat, for it was the latter's business to make himself as inconspicuous as possible.

Mrs. Pennyfeather, the housekeeper, tall, gaunt, and grimly self-repressed, answered Cameron's ring. She gave one look at the derby hat, the square-toed shoes, and said under her breath, "another detective."

"Well?" she demanded challengingly; she didn't think so much of detectives since the passing of the past few hours. Until now her mind had placed a certain amount of glamour about the profession, but the death of her employer had shattered her faith.

Cameron fished in the pocket of his baggy tweed coat for a card which he handed to her. "Give this to Detective Faulkner, if he is on the premises," he requested with a tone of authority. Mrs. Pennyfeather looked at it, seeing only, "James Montgomery." But they couldn't fool her; he was a detective. "Tell Mr. Faulkner that I am here on official business."

"Oh, he's on the premises, all right!" shrilled Mrs. Pennyfeather. "Much good that does, the blunderin' idiot that he is! Let Mr. Cole be murdered right under his very eyes."

"The card, please," insisted Vance Cameron, and Mrs. Pennyfeather, sniffing, turned inside. She returned in a moment leading him to the library. Sam Faulkner stood with his back to the bookcases, fingering the card; he gave Cameron a swift once-over and also accepted the newcomer as a man of his profession.

"What do you want to see me about, Mr. Montgomery?" he demanded jerkily, his voice harsh as the edge of a file. "That woman, confound her sneering impudence, said——"

"That I was here on official business," supplied Vance Cameron. "That's only partly true, Mr. Faulkner; I suppose you might call it unofficially official. I shall be frank enough to tell you that I am here incognito to offer what help I can in running down this murder. My name is not James Montgomery, but it will do for the occasion."

Faulkner glowered coldly; he had troubles enough as it was without being bothered by some unknown detective seeking a chance to try out his talents with the hope of making himself a reputation.

"Oh, I'm not a butter-in, Mr. Faulkner," volunteered Vance Cameron. "I may tell you that my visit is due solely to one thing, and that's The Scarlet X. Brundage——" He broke off abruptly as if he had been on the verge of saying too much.

At the name of New York's police inspector, Faulkner looked up with a thawing interest. "You're a headquarters man?" he demanded.

"Not—well, officially," answered Cameron. "My work is of such a nature to require considerable secrecy. I have no badge, no credentials, but you'll find, Mr. Faulkner, that I can probably pull you out of this mess." His tone was so matter of fact, so pregnant with confidence, that it made an impression on the tortured Sam Faulkner. After all, what harm could there be? He could expect no help from the Westfields authorities, untrained as they were in dealing with crime.

"Do you mean to tell me," he demanded, "that the New York police actually take any stock in this Scarlet X nonsense?" His tone was incredulous.

"I take it that you don't," said Vance Cameron.

"Of course not," admitted Faulkner.

Cameron shook his head. "That's where you're very wrong. The story in *The Sphere* was pretty accurate as a whole. There's unquestionably a Scarlet X; it was conceived for the purpose of making six swindlers pay back money that rightfully belonged to others. They couldn't be touched by law so The Scarlet X used the force of fear. Louis Leighton, the chief swindler, met a violent death, and——"

"You think he was murdered?"

"No, I don't think that, Mr. Faulkner," answered Vance Cameron; "I can say with great positiveness that Leighton's accident was merely used as a club, and that it had the desired effect. Morally, The Scarlet X is in the right—the collection of debts of justice—although legally it is a criminal organization.

"But let us not waste any time over that. If you will permit my coöperation, I should be glad to have the firsthand facts of the Cole murder and do all I can. I want no fee, no credit; my sole desire is to see the guilt placed where it belongs."

Sam Faulkner dropped into a chair. "This—this is certainly the most amazing thing I've ever had happen to me," he gasped out. "As I understand it, you're secretly employed by the New York police department to track down The Scarlet X." He paused for a moment. "So there really is a Scarlet X? I—I can't believe it even yet!"

He began to recite the facts which had led up to the Roger Cole murder with great fidelity of detail.

"It's been my theory all along," he concluded, "that Chester Waldron, beaten in the courts, tried to frighten Cole into paying over the money, and if he'd waited another day, I think Waldron would have succeeded. Cole's nerve was gone, and he was ready to surrender; he was sorry that he hadn't left the money in his safe so that it could be stolen and the account squared.

"In my own mind there isn't a particle of doubt but that Cole did steal the vulcanizing process from Waldron. He was one of those greedy guys who didn't see any sense in paying for something that he could take for nothing.

"I've laughed at The Scarlet X idea, although Cole's nephew has stuck to it all along. It's been my notion that Waldron and Mary Nash—they're engaged to be married, by the way—have a confederate, and that this confederate is the chap who put the fourth letter into Cole's pocket and broke into the office last night."

"And who fired the rifle?"

"Of course," agreed Faulkner. "Since my men have been trailing Waldron and had him under surveillance in New York at the time of the murder, we know that he didn't commit the actual crime, although as an accessory before the fact he's equally guilty.

"I've had Waldron and Mary Nash placed under arrest this morning. Surprisingly enough they waived extradition and are now on their way to Westfields. It's my idea to put 'em on the grill until they cough up with a full confession and give us the name of the

confederate. They know who the murderer is! Even if it's The Scarlet X, they can put us on the right trail."

Vance Cameron digested this information as he fingered the bogus mustache on his lip. "Let's get down to the actual crime," he suggested. "You say that the rifle was fired through the window of Cole's bedroom from the roof of the porch?"

"That's the only place it could have been fired from," answered Faulkner. The location of Cole's bed made it impossible that the gun could have been fired from any of the trees on the lawn, and, besides that, the rifle wasn't fired out on the grounds. As I told you, Mr. —er—Montgomery, I believe is the name you're using—I was sitting down here in the library; it sounded as if the gun was exploded directly over my head, inside of the house. Of course, with the barrel being poked through the broken window, it would have been inside the house."

"Footprints beside the porch?"

"No," groaned Faulkner. "And that's the uncanny part of it. The ground is soft, unsodded dirt in spots where there are rosebushes, and there's not one footprint, not a mark of any kind. More than that, man, the eaves of the porch protrude a good four feet over the supports. How even an agile monkey could have climbed it, I can't understand. Then, added to that, the porch pillars were repainted only last week—white. There's not a mark on 'em. Neither do I find, on the porch roof, a single mark.

"Another thing—I was sitting in the library with the porch just outside. How could any man make it without creating enough noise to attract my attention?" He threw up his hands helplessly. "Do you wonder, man, that I'm puzzled."

Vance Cameron shook his head slowly. "If the facts are as you have stated them," he declared, "then the shot wasn't fired from the top of the porch." He smiled faintly. "Even The Scarlet X, Mr. Faulkner, can not accomplish the impossible. What about the possibility of some one lowering themselves level with the second floor from—well, say, the third floor?"

"That's no go," he answered. "The roof slants downward on that side of the house, and there are no third-floor windows on that side. The only windows of the third floor are on the gable side of the house."

"I see," mused Cameron; "then, unless we find something else, the top of the porch, unless—but wait a minute. Aren't there any more second-floor windows opening onto the roof of the porch?"

"Yes, but it's the room that belonged to Roger Cole's wife. It is the one bit of sentiment that the man seemed to have. He locked up the room just as she left it. I broke in there, of course, after the shooting, and found that the window was not only locked but nailed shut."

"If you have no objection, Faulkner, I'd like to have a look at the room where Cole was killed."

"I'm willing," agreed the other, but before they could ascend the stairs there came the sound of an approaching motor. Faulkner, looking out the window, gave an exclamation of satisfaction.

"Here comes our solution," he said. "Right now I'm more interested in hearing *who* did it than to speculate on *how* it was done. There are my men with Waldron and the Nash girl. They know who killed Roger Cole!"

CHAPTER X.

WALDRON AND THE GIRL GO TO JAIL.

ONE of the operatives of the Faulkner Agency came rushing into the house ahead of the prisoners, a grimly triumphant smile on his mouth.

"The girl's confessed, chief!" he an-

nounced. "Halsey an' me put 'em through the jumps, an' the skirt broke down an' come through."

"What!" exclaimed Faulkner. "You mean, Billings, that she's confessed to croaking Cole?"

"What I mean," amended the operative, "is that she's come through with part of it. She admits to writin' them letters, or rather one of 'em. She's holdin' out on the rest of it, but she's weakenin', chief; she's weakenin' fast."

Halsey, the other agency man, followed into the room with Chester Waldron and the girl. Waldron was handcuffed. He was a clean-cut, pleasant-eyed chap, age under thirty. His face was pale, as was to be expected under the circumstances.

"Take off the nippers," Faulkner ordered. "Now sit down, you two. Halsey, you and Billings step outside until I call you." He hesitated a moment. "You can stay, if you want to," he said to Vance Cameron.

The latter was giving the two prisoners a look of appraising scrutiny. He saw in Chester Waldron a likable young man with a serious manner and the hands of a mechanic, the kind of a mechanic that loves and masters his trade, for the fingers were slim and capable.

Mary Nash, he judged, was a girl with ideas, quick-witted and impulsive. She was, without doubt, badly frightened.

"Is—is it true" she whispered; "what they told us—about Mr. Cole being dead?"

"Murdered," Faulkner flung at her. "You knew that he was to be murdered if he didn't come through with Waldron's twenty thousand dollars."

The girl cringed back in the chair. "Oh, you don't understand," she cried. "Even—even I don't understand; I—I can't explain——"

"You've confessed to writing those letters," charged Faulkner.

"She's done nothing of the sort," shouted Chester Waldron, leaning forward. "She told them that she wrote *one* of the letters. Even that isn't true. She's trying to protect me; it was I who wrote that letter—the first one signed The Scarlet X."

Mary Nash smiled pitifully. "It—it's Chester—trying to protect me," she said. "I am willing to tell the truth—all the truth. Mr. Cole stole Chester's invention; he promised Chester twenty thousand dollars for it, and then when it was finished he sent the drawings to Washington, got the patent in his own name, and offered Chester a paltry thousand dollars. As you know, Chester went to law about it, but Mr. Cole won.

"It—it was all so unfair! Chester and I had planned and planned——" A sob caught in her voice. "But that makes no difference, I suppose. I'd read in the papers something about The Scarlet X making dishonest people pay back what they had stolen—stolen legally. I—I thought perhaps if I wrote a letter and signed it with an X in red ink that Mr. Cole would think The Scarlet X was after him and do the right thing."

"So you do admit it, eh?" thundered Faulkner.

"That—that first letter, yes. I wrote it on my typewriter in the office. Chester knew nothing about it; not a thing! When I went to New York to visit my sister over Sunday, I mailed that letter at the Grand Central Station.

"Mr. Cole got it on Monday morning, and I watched him to see what effect it would have on him. I knew it wouldn't work; it didn't frighten him at all. Just made him angry.

"I swear to you that the one letter was all I sent. Yesterday I went into Mr. Cole's private office to give him some letters for signing. I couldn't help seeing the letter. It was signed with The Scarlet X, but it wasn't the one I wrote, and I couldn't understand. It—it startled me. Mr. Cole gave me a queer look that frightened me. It was

as if he were shouting at me, 'Miss Nash, you wrote this letter.'

"That's the whole truth of it—everything I can tell you."

"Oh, no it isn't, young woman, not by a whole lot, it isn't," snapped out Faulkner. "You might as well understand this right now, that until you cough up the name of the third man in on this scheme, you go to jail and stay there until you *are* ready to talk."

"J—jail," she whispered. "Why—why—I haven't done anything to——"

"You can't send her to jail if I take the blame," said Chester Waldron.

"Both of you go to jail," Faulkner said. "We've got enough to hold you—the admission that you did write one letter. Behind the bars you stay until you give me the name of the man who was to have two thousand dollars out of the twenty-two thousand dollars for his share, the man who put the fourth letter in Cole's pocket, who followed him to the bank and watched him cash the check for your blackmail money, who opened the safe in Cole's office, and who fired two bullets into Roger Cole's body as he lay asleep in his bed!"

"Come across with the truth and there's a chance of clemency; act stubborn and you'll get the limit."

Mary Nash shuddered, but she showed no signs of weakening. "You—you'll have to take me to jail," she said, "there's nothing more that I can tell you."

"Is it that you're afraid of The Scarlet X?" demanded Faulkner. Getting no answer to this last question he recalled his two operatives. "Take 'em!" he thundered. "Throw 'em in a cell; let 'em have a taste of prison life, and then they'll feel more like talking."

Click! The handcuffs snapped about Chester Waldron's wrists again, and the two prisoners were led from the room. When they had gone Faulkner turned to Vance Cameron who had not offered to take any part in the cross-questioning.

"There's nothing like a few hours behind the bars to loosen their tongues," Faulkner said growlingly. "There's nothing so stubborn as a stubborn woman, but she'll talk, all right; she'll talk."

Vance Cameron indulged himself a queer little smile. "Didn't it occur to you, Faulkner," he murmured, "that the girl might be telling the truth?"

A look of surprise came into the other man's face. "What! You don't believe that cock-and-bull story about her sending one letter and denying authorship of the rest?"

"In the language of the court," answered Cameron, "I will reserve decision and take the matter under advisement. Suppose we have a look at the murder room now."

CHAPTER XI.

UNEXPECTED DISCOVERIES.

EXCEPT for the removal of Roger Cole's body to a Westfields undertaking establishment, where, also, Tom Medbury, the nephew, had gone to look after some matters concerning the burial arrangements, nothing in the fatal room had been disturbed. Even the glass from the broken window lay where it had fallen.

Vance Cameron's first point of inspection was the window; looking through the shattered pane he saw that the shingles were covered by a light film of dust, the unbroken surface of which straightway precluded any notion that any one could have stood there to fire the rifle. A glance at the trees across the lawn made any supposition of the shot coming from there nothing short of ridiculous.

He turned his attention to the broken glass, and a light of quickened interest showed in his eyes. "You said, Mr. Faulkner," he murmured, "that you heard three shots?"

"That's right."

"And that two bullets took effect in the murdered man's body?"

"You've got it straight."

"Have you looked for the third bullet, Mr. Faulkner?"

"No, I didn't think it worth wasting time over."

"If you don't object, I'll waste a little time looking for it," said Vance Cameron and, ignoring the other's grunt of protest, went about the task. At the end of a quarter of an hour he had satisfied himself and confirmed a suspicion that had entered his mind when he had stared down at the shattered glass of the window, that there was no third bullet to be accounted for within the room.

For another few minutes he roved about, looking into the two clothes closets, moving the articles of furniture while Faulkner formed the impression that the man who called himself "Montgomery" was trying to pull "Sherlock stuff."

"Looking for a secret panel, I suppose," he observed with the suspicion of a sneer. At this particular moment Vance Cameron had bent forward to pick up a bit of white something no larger than a pea; apparently absent-minded, he rubbed it between his fingers and then glanced up.

"Who occupies the room above this?" he asked.

"Cole's nephew, Tom Medbury."

"Ah," murmured Cameron with a faint elevation of his eyebrows. "Nephew, eh? Relations cordial?"

"What the devil do you think you're driving at now?" queried Faulkner growlingly.

"Driving for facts," answered the other. "I was just thinking that the nephew is one person who would have had ample opportunity to have slid that fourth Scarlet X letter into Cole's pocket, that he was the one person whom we know for a positive fact to have known of his uncle's plan to consult you. He would have a chance to know, if any one did, that his uncle was intending to put the twenty-two thousand dollars in the safe."

"Everything but a chance to do the croak job," retorted Faulkner. "Didn't I tell you that as I was coming up the stairs, not less than five seconds after the shots were fired, Medbury came down the stairs from the third floor with the housekeeper right behind him?"

"Yes, you told me that," admitted Vance Cameron, "but——"

"Sh!" warned Faulkner. "I hear Medbury's voice downstairs now; I think he's asking for me. Don't make a fool of yourself by cutting loose with any wild theories——"

"Theories are mighty fine things to have when you can't prove them," interrupted Cameron. "Listen to me, Faulkner; I'm on a hot trail. You wait for the count of ten and then call Medbury upstairs into this room. Keep him in conversation about anything for a minute or so. It won't be long. I can promise you that something will happen."

And before Faulkner could give voice to a complaining protest Vance Cameron had darted out of the room, taking to the stairs which led to the third floor. Faulkner had no intention of carrying out the other's instructions, but Medbury himself created exactly the same situation by coming up the stairs.

"Oh, hello, Faulkner," he said. "I was asking where you were. Still looking for clews, I see. It's an amazing business, isn't it? Baffling is the word. Any progress?"

"Some," answered Faulkner. Despite himself he found that the bogus Montgomery had sown seeds of suspicion, and he caught himself staring at the murdered man's nephew with a new intentness. "My men brought in Waldron and the girl. She's confessed——"

"What?" shouted Medbury. "Confessed?"

"To writing one of those letters," continued the detective. "However, she de-

nies the others. I've packed both of 'em off to jail until they're ready to do more talking. A few hours in a cell——" He stopped abruptly as a startled cry burst from Medbury who flattened back against the wall, his face suddenly ashen, his eyes lifted upward in a look of paralyzed terror.

Faulkner followed the direction of his gaze and saw a most amazing thing. The electric-light fixture was being lowered from the center of the ceiling. The metal rosette of decorative design, some ten inches in diameter, had concealed a clean-cut hole just a trifle smaller. Then there poked through the opening the barrel of a small-caliber rifle.

"I've got him covered, Faulkner," came the voice of Vance Cameron through the hole in the cealing. "This is how it was done. Put the bracelets on him."

And Tom Medbury was too stunned by the suddenness of it to offer resistance as Sam Faulkner, leaping into sudden action, flung himself forward and circled the wrists of Roger Cole's nephew with manacles of steel.

CHAPTER XII.

MEDBURY'S CONFESSION.

"THERE are three classes of crimes," said Vance Cameron when, a moment later, he was back on the second floor, carrying the rifle in the crook of his arm. "There are the stupid ones, the clever ones, and thirdly, those that are too clever. This one was too clever, so clever that it was stupid, if you know what I mean.

"Medbury here, I suppose, thought that he could saddle anything onto The Scarlet X, that nothing was past belief when it came to that organization; but even The Scarlet X cannot walk on dust-coated roofs without leaving footprints."

"How—how did you figure it out?" gasped out Detective Faulkner.

"Suppose we hear, first, what Medbury has to say," suggested Cameron. "I have a feeling that he wants to make a full confession."

"I—I might as well—confess," Medbury whispered hoarsely, looking down at the gleaming metal of the handcuffs. "It means the chair; you've got me dead to rights.

"I killed Uncle Roger to keep him from finding out that I'd forged his endorsements to a note. He always was a stingy old devil; thought I ought to get along on fifty dollars a week. A friend of mine got me to buy some stock, sure-thing tip and that kind of thing. Didn't have any money, but he said he'd take my note if Uncle Roger endorsed it. It looked good to me, big money you know. The note was due next Tuesday; five thousand dollars it was.

"If that note was called, Uncle Roger would have to know that I'd forged his name. And I knew what that meant. He didn't have many scruples himself, but that wouldn't have helped me. I knew what would happen; he'd kick me out. I'd lose the chance of inheriting the tire factory some day.

"That hole's been cut in the ceiling for weeks, long before I had the Scarlet X idea. I intended to shoot him and drop the gun down after him—try to make it look like suicide. But after I got the hole cut through and fixed the light fixture so I could let it down and pull it back in place again, I knew it was too dangerous. Some smart detective would come in and say that it wasn't medically possible for that kind of a wound to be self-inflicted.

"Then the first Scarlet-X letter came. I suspected right off that Mary Nash wrote it, and when I compared it with the work of her typewriter, I knew it. Uncle Roger didn't scare worth a cent, but it gave me the idea to keep on sending the letters myself until I got him good and scared. I bought a second-hand typewriter in New York and made

special trips to mail 'em. I was hoping that he'd take the money out there to Rouse's Inlet so that I'd have a chance to grab it without killing him. I didn't want to kill Uncle Roger, but I—I had to save myself!

"I thought he was going to take the money along, and that I was going with him. I'd hoped for a chance to tap him on the back of the head, get the money, and tell a story about us being held up on the way by The Scarlet X.

"Then when he told me that he was going to put the money in the safe—at least that's what I thought he meant—I was sure I could get out of the mess. When he'd gone to Rouse's Inlet, I slipped out of the house, got on my bicycle, and went to the factory. You see, I'd seen him open that safe many times, and I'd memorized the combination. As you know, he kept no money in it, usually. Of course I had a key to the office. Didn't take but a minute to get the safe open, and"—his voice was bitter as if he blamed this circumstance for the whole thing—"and found that the money wasn't there after all.

"Lippert, the watchman, almost caught me, but, don't you see, I had to take the chance of writing a postscript to that letter, and I couldn't write it in long hand for that would have been a dead give-away.

"The rest of it you know. After Uncle Roger went to bed I went up to my room on the third floor—aw, what's the use? You know what I did as well as I do."

"Yes, I think so," agreed Vance Cameron. "You turned back the carpet which let you remove the square section that you had sawed out of the flooring. in the open space between the floor and the ceiling below you had the rifle, a bottle of red ink, a small camel's hair brush, and your Marlin typewriter, which is a very compact writing machine and fitted conveniently into the space. The lighting fixture was held in place with a strip of metal that loosened enough for you to make sure that your uncle was asleep. Then you let it the full way down, giving you plenty of range for your rifle.

"The first shot was for your uncle's heart, but to make sure you aimed for his head. The third was to shatter the window."

There was no conscience-stricken, maudlin hysteria on Tom Medbury's part. Except for a slight trembling of the lips he was stoical. He nodded confirmation.

"Faulkner wouldn't have gotten the goods on me in a thousand years," he said. "He was dead set on hanging it on Chester Waldron and Mary Nash. How—how did you figure it out?"

"You were too clever," answered Vance Cameron, "or, rather, you were giving The Scarlet X credit for impossible achievements. Then there was the matter of the shattered window; it's hard to tell about falling glass, but I'd have wagered a hundred to a dime that the shot was fired from the inside. However, I couldn't be sure, even in my own mind, until I'd established the fact that there was no accounting for the third bullet. Three shots were fired; two bullets found Mr. Cole. Where was the third? If it had crashed through the window from the outside it was bound to be somewhere in the room, which search proved was not. That convinced me that my hunch was right, and that the bullet had been fired from inside the room.

"But from where? This is what gave me the right clew." He exhibited the bit of white substance which he had picked up from the floor. "Nothing more or less, gentlemen, than this particle of plastering which was knocked loose when the barrel of the rifle was poked through the opening."

"I'll be eternally blasted!" exclaimed Sam Faulkner. "Just a bit of plaster-

ing. And I walked over it two dozen times."

Tom Medbury, showing no signs of breaking down, was taken to the police station in Vance Cameron's car, and, of course, Chester Waldron and Mary Nash were released with Detective Faulkner's most profuse apologies. Cameron aroused Mary Nash's curiosity by asking her for the address where she could be reached by mail.

"I might be wanting to send you a wedding present," he chuckled.

Some minutes later, with Faulkner a passenger, Vance Cameron's machine was moving away from Westfields.

"There's just one thing to discover," said Cameron, "and that is where Roger Cole put the twenty-two thousand dollars that he didn't put into the safe yesterday."

"I'd forgotten about that," said Faulkner. "What does it matter?"

"It matters a good deal to me; I never like to quit a job until I've cleaned it up. What do you say that we go to the tire factory and have a look for that money?"

Faulkner was not in a mood to deny any request of this strange detective who had saved his face for him and he agreed.

As a result of the tragedy the tire factory had temporarily suspended operations, and the office was, of course, locked. However, Lippert, the watchman, his head in bandages, was on the job. He remembered Faulkner from the previous night and, honoring his detective's badge, gave them admittance.

Vance Cameron switched on the lights of the departed Roger Cole's private sanctum and stood in the center of the room, turning slowly about as he tried to place himself in the position of a man wanting to hide money in a place where no one would think of looking for it.

He decided that, himself debating that problem, he would select the least hidden of recesses. Not the desk, for the outpulled drawers showed that Tom Medbury had searched there in frantic haste when the safe had failed to reveal the modest fortune. Nor the wastebasket; some employee would be too apt to empty the receptacle. So, as a matter of simple elimination, he decided on the framed pictures of Cole tires.

Sam Faulkner was watching him from the doorway, apparently eager to study the methods of a sleuth who had dispatched the Cole murder mystery so neatly. Cameron suppressed an exclamation of elation as, behind the second picture, he found the neat sheaf of bills. But he made no move to take possession of it; instead he made an elaborate pretense of searching other places and at last he lifted his hands in a gesture of surrender. "I give it up!" he exclaimed with well-stimulated disgust. "Let's be going."

"You certainly overlooked no bets," laughingly replied Faulkner. "If you haven't found it, there's small use for me to try. Wonder if the old boy didn't take it home with him at that?"

When they were at the front entrance, ready to step outside, Vance Cameron snapped his fingers in pretended vexation.

"Confound it," he muttered, "I think I left my cigarette case back there on the desk—back in a minute."

Faulkner, suddenly suspicious, followed him, and, as Cameron's hand slid behind the picture frame for the packet of bills the other confronted him from the doorway, his face suddenly hard.

"So you're a clever crook as well as a clever detective," he charged. "Going South with Cole's twenty-two thousand dollars, eh?"

Vance Cameron trembled from head to foot. "Don't—don't turn me up, Faulkner," he pleaded. "I——"

"Give me that money," snapped out Faulkner; "you—you crook! No, darn you, I don't suppose I can turn you in after the way you helped me out, but

you're a disgrace to the New York police department. I've got some respect for an out-and-out crook, but a crook who hides behind his shield is beneath contempt. Give me that money, I said!" Faulkner gazed at him in dismay.

Cameron took a step forward, holding the money in seemingly nervous fingers; suddenly, within striking distance, his fingers gripped shut and a mean fist shot out and caught Sam Faulkner on the point of the jaw. The private detective's head snapped back, and he sank to the floor in a limp, bulky heap.

Making sure that Faulkner was out for some time, Vance Cameron went into the outer office, sat down at a typewriter, and wrote a letter, to be read by that gentleman when he should recover consciousness. It read:

DEAR FAULKNER: Sorry I had to be rough with you, but it might have been difficult to make you understand just what I proposed to do with the twenty-two thousand dollars. When you glance at the signature you may guess.

The case was an easy one for me, for I had the handicap of knowing, right from the start, that Cole's murder was the work of some criminal who was aping The Scarlet X in an effort to cover his own guilty tracks. You are a good sport, an honest cop, and I am your friend. THE GENUINE ——.

He took the sheet of paper from the typewriter, uncapped a fountain pen filled with red ink, and signed at the bottom—The Scarlet X.

Two days later Mary Nash was married and received a package by registered mail; when she opened it she found that it contained twenty-two one thousand-dollar bills with a brief typewritten statement:

Inclosed find remittance in full liquidation of "Debt of Justice Account Number Twelve."

It, too, was signed The Scarlet X, and Mary Nash, nestling within her husband's arm, gave an excited gasp.

"Oh, Ches," she whispered in an awed voice, "the man—in the gray tweed—he said—he might want to send me—a wedding present. He—he was—The Scarlet X!"

"Nonsense," exclaimed Waldron. "The man in the gray tweeds was a detective."

"Of course he was," laughingly replied Mary Nash, "a detective for himself—running down the real murderer so that he wouldn't be considered responsible. What a joke on Detective Faulkner, trying to make you and I tell him the identity of The Scarlet X, with the real and genuine Scarlet X right in the same room with him! I wonder if he'll ever know the truth."

And, although he did know the truth and shrewdly suspected what disposition had been made of the twenty-two thousand dollars, Detective Faulkner kept his own counsel.

MURDER SUSPECT GOES INSANE AWAITING TRIAL

INSANITY, said to have been brought about by fear of death, has resulted in the transfer of John Melchionne from the Tombs in New York to the Matteawan Hospital for the criminal insane. Melchionne is one of five men accused of the murder of five-year-old Giuseppe Varotta, three of whom have already been taken to Sing Sing as condemned men. Melchionne was to have been the next one to be brought to trial, but there had been considerable delay in his case due to the illness of his lawyer, resulting in several postponements of trial. Doctor Menas S. Gregory of Bellevue diagnosed Melchionne's case as dementia præcox; the lunacy committee showed that the prisoner was sane at the time of the murder, but insane now. The fifth man implicated in the killing is James Ruggieri, who is now awaiting trial.

The Gray Phantom's Madness

by

Herman Landon

Author of the "Picaroon" Stories, etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

FOR three years The Gray Phantom has been living quietly at Sea Glimpse, when the father of Helen Hardwick, whom The Phantom adores, is kidnaped. His kidnapers demand ten million dollars for his release. The Phantom comes back to New York and starts in operation a plan to get the money. He sends a letter to each of ten millionaires, asking each for a million. Mr. J. Pendleton Craig is one of them.

Mr. Craig has an uneasy conscience about a shady transaction in Climax Oil stock made some years ago; also about a murder which he thinks no one knows he committed. He goes to Tuckaway Camp, a secluded retreat in Connecticut, for a rest. Here he is murdered, and The Gray Phantom is accused of the crime.

Helen Hardwick trails a Mr. Whipple, who is spokesman for the kidnapers. Whipple discovers her and takes her to her father's hideaway, but blindfolded. While there, Helen learns that she is in a boathouse at Tuckaway Camp. Whipple's safety would be jeopardized if she spread this knowledge, so he keeps her captive, also.

The Gray Phantom assumes the disguise of a bookish criminologist and goes to Tuckaway Camp as "Philip Dawson" to investigate the murder of Craig. A lawyer named Stanhope invites him to stay for dinner. The Phantom accepts, and they are joined by Harry Bell, a detective of shady repute, and Lieutenant Culligore, of the New York police department, The Phantom's closest pursuer. By drawing lots it is arranged that Dawson shall sleep in the room in which Craig was killed. Before the night is over, Bell and a neighbor named Hollister discover that he is The Phantom.

Shortly after midnight some one enters The Phantom's room and warns him away. They tussle, and The Phantom is knocked unconscious. When he reawakens, he is startled to discover a metallic object on the floor.

CHAPTER XX.

THE CHINESE COIN.

IN the dusk where he stood, the object Vanardy had found on the floor gleamed with a hard, yellow sheen as it lay in his palm. For the third time that night his sense of intuition was outstripping his thoughts, giving vague glimpses of things which his mind could not yet grasp. He had experienced the same kind of sensation when he saw the purplish design above Stanhope's wrist, and again when he found the little rift between the doorjamb and the sill. On both occasions he had felt a vague and yet familiar thrill which experience had taught him not to ignore, a vagrant premonition which hinted at a deeper significance than appearances indicated.

It was so now. With a little quiver of excitement he turned to the table to examine the object under the light. Since he had found it on the scene of the recent struggle, it was probable that it had dropped out of his antagonist's pocket. It seemed a trifling thing, merely a circular piece of brass, slightly larger than a quarter, with a square hole in the center and four curious designs engraved on the surface. Though outwardly of no significance, it yet constituted Vanardy's only tangible clew to the identity of the man he had grappled with.

He studied it intently, and a brief inspection under the light showed him what it was, a Chinese coin of small denomination. He had seen samples of the same specie before. The cabalistic designs on the face of the coin were

Chinese characters, and the hole in the center was explained by the natives' habit of carrying such coins on a string.

Reflectively Vanardy weighed the little piece of metal in his palm. He doubted whether there were many such coins in America, for the denomination was too small for use in international commerce. Possibly, he reasoned, somebody had been carrying it as a curiosity. At any rate, its value as a clew would be enhanced by the fact that only a few coins of that kind had ever appeared in America. He slipped the little brass piece into his pocket.

It was four o'clock, but he was in no condition to sleep. The stinging sensation in his head had disappeared, leaving his mind clear, but it was full of clashing impressions, and he felt a feverish craving for action that made relaxation impossible. He opened the door and looked out into the hall. The entire house seemed immersed in slumber and darkness. Very softly he stepped out and entered the bathroom, a few paces down the corridor. William had explained that the house was very old, that private bathrooms had not been in vogue in this locality when it was built, but the explanation had left a doubt in Vanardy's mind. It seemed rather odd that Craig had not modernized the arrangement by constructing a direct connection between the sleeping chamber and the bathroom.

He switched on the light and, standing before the mirror, repaired the damages to his toilet. From time to time he made dexterous use of the contents of a little box which he had carried with him to Tuckaway Camp. At length his appearance satisfied his critical eye, and he gave the bathroom a thorough inspection, with particular attention to the wall separating it from the bedchamber. Partly built into this wall, on the opposite side, was the fireplace. He contemplated this portion of it with special interest, but nothing seemed out of the ordinary. At length he left the bathroom, passed down the hall a little distance, and entered the room on the other side of the bedchamber. As William had told him, this was another guest room, but evidently it had not been in use for some time. With great care he studied its boundaries, but he saw nothing that deviated from the principle of solid comfort and durability upon which the entire house appeared to have been built.

Vaguely disappointed, he turned away and began to descend the great staircase. With the intensified stillness of early morning brooding over the house, it seemed an excellent time to do a little private reconnoitering. He walked down two flights, the heavy carpets muffling his footfalls, and then, with one hand resting on the newel post, he abruptly drew in his steps.

A long hall stretched before him, a light glowing dimly at its farther end. Silently he stepped around the newel post, crouched a little, and stared intently into the gloom on all sides. He could neither hear nor see anything, but he had a peculiar impression that some one was approaching with a furtive and soundless step. He leaned forward, all his senses tinglingly alert, and now a shadowy shape flitted across his range of vision, moving in a direction opposite the point where the light shone.

He could see it only for a moment, an uncertain flicker against a background of densely massed shadows, and then it disappeared from sight, leaving behind it an impression of uneasiness and stealth. On hands and knees Vanardy crept forward, turned down the corridor in the direction where the prowler had disappeared, and again he became conscious of a furtive movement in the darkness. The heavy carpet deadened all sounds, but the person moving ahead of him seemed to leave a troubled breath in his wake.

Vanardy halted, pressing close to the wall, for something told him that the person in front had suddenly stopped. He waited, and the sound of some one's excited breathing floated out to him on the silence. Doubtless the prowler wished to make certain that no one was following. His movements hinted strongly of secrecy and dark designs. A brief interval of silence came, and then a slight sound told Vanardy that a door had been opened a few paces down the corridor. A narrow wedge of light was projected into the darkness, and then a voice spoke, a hushed, tremulous voice that awoke a thousand thunderous echoes within the listener.

For a moment, while time and space seemed blotted out, he lay stonily still. All he had heard was an exclamation, a broken cry of dread and suspense, but he had recognized the voice at once. It was Helen's. The recognition came on a tumultuous crash of emotions that left him momentarily dazed. He sprang to his feet, trying to steady the maddening uproar in his head, and ran to the point where he had seen the wedge of light. It was gone now, leaving an intensified gloom behind it. The silence that followed the single outcry seemed to mock the din and commotion within him. Everything was so still and dark that the voice and the light, though they had been startlingly real a moment ago, might have been only remnants of a dream.

A shout rose in his throat, but he stifled it in time. It would not do to call Helen's name, for the cry might arouse the other occupants of the house, and there was no one whom he could wholly trust, save possibly Culligore—and Culligore was The Gray Phantom's sworn enemy. There was a frenzy in his veins as his hands groped over the tantalizing blankness of a wall. He was certain as to the point where the light had appeared, but there was no sign of a door. He tried to control his burning impatience, telling himself that the prowler must reappear sooner or later, and that his only practical course was to compose himself for a wait.

Minutes dragged with the slow tread of hours. He felt hot and feverish, with a parched sensation in his throat. Unable to keep still, he walked back and forth in front of the spot where the light had appeared, the echoes of Helen's voice shooting through his brain with maddening insistence.

Of a sudden he paused, staring fixedly into the darkness. A sound, faint and fugitive, hammered loudly at his senses. It did not seem to come from the exact location where the prowler had disappeared, but a little farther down the hall. A streak of light appeared, growing rapidly wider, and in an instant he darted back against the opposite wall, waiting until a shadow fell across the patch of light.

In a moment he felt amazingly cool. The furious beat of his pulses quieted down. For an instant longer he remained in the sheltering shadows, then stepped briskly toward the tall figure standing in the opening, looking nervously up and down the corridor.

"Well, William?" he said quietly.

A gasp issued raspingly from the servant's throat. A look of consternation crossed his pale face. His hand, clutching a pistol, came upward. With a firm push Vanardy sent him back through the opening. They were in a short hall, extending at right angles to the main corridor, with a door in the back and an electric light in a wall fixture.

William, cocking his head to one side and peering with sullen intentness at Vanardy, retreated until he stood with his back to the door. His face was white, but there was a determined twist to his lips, and he was quickly recovering from the shock he had received.

"What do you wish, Mr. Dawson?" he asked in a tone that was a curious

mingling of insolence and formal politeness.

"I might demand an explanation of you," said Vanardy, "but I haven't time for that now. I want to see what is behind that door."

He came forward, pointing at a door behind the servant's back. William regarded him with a look of malignant determination. The pistol rose a little higher in his hand.

"Not another step, Mr. Dawson," he said grittily. "You'll be a dead man the moment you touch me."

"Very theatrical, William, but you couldn't stop me with a machine gun. Stand aside!"

With a recklessness that had its effect on William, he walked straight toward the menacing pistol. There was a smile on his lips, a metallic glitter in his eyes.

"Stop!" cried William shakily. "I swear I'll shoot if you don't——"

Vanardy laughed, dodged to the side, and with an incredibly swift movement sprang on the servant and wrenched the pistol from his hand. With a snarl of rage and bafflement, William struck out with his fist, but Vanardy caught his hand in a grip that drew a cry of pain from him. Seizing him by the neck, he flung him easily to the floor and placed a knee on his chest.

"I don't quite trust you, William," he said levelly. "I am afraid you might prove an annoyance unless I protect myself. Let me see."

For a moment his eye rested on the tasseled cord around the drab dressing gown the servant wore. Despite William's strenuous objections he detached it and wound it tightly around his wrists. Severing the remaining length, he tied the man's feet in an expert manner.

"I won't put you to the humiliation of gagging you," he remarked. "Something tells me that you have no desire to call for help. It might lead to embarrassing questions."

For a moment he stood looking down at his captive, who squirmed and tugged impotently at the cords, then walked to the door and flung it open. It turned heavily, as if constructed to resist assault. The interior was dark, but the moment he entered, the impression came to him that he was not alone.

"Who is there?" asked a faint voice.

A thrill swept through him, causing his pulses to beat with a fierce ecstasy.

"Helen!" he whispered hoarsely. "Helen! Where are you?"

A glad little cry sounded in the gloom. "Phantom Man!"

He rushed forward, arms outstretched. A trembling form sprang into his arms and nestled there, alternating between sobs and soft laughter.

"Oh, Phantom Man, I'm so glad!" she murmured, and then she was silent for a while, being content to feel the touch of his arms and hear his caressing voice. "I knew you would come," she went on. "You have never failed me. But when the door opened, I couldn't know who it was, and I was frightened. Such dreadful things have happened lately. I switched off the light and tried to hide. forgetting there was no place to hide in. Hold me close, Phantom Man! I don't know whether I want to laugh or cry."

She did a little of each as his hand softly brushed her face, playing with her silken and fragrant coils of hair.

"We must have light," she said after a while. "I want to see if it is really you."

She stepped out of his arms, and in a few moments, with a faint click, a light appeared. She turned and stood facing him, her large, brown eyes widening.

"Oh!" she gasped. "I thought——"

He laughed reassuringly, just then remembering his borrowed rôle. "Yes, it is really I," he told her, "though I have convinced certain people that I am Philip Dawson, amateur criminologist. You don't seem to like my get-up."

"I like you best when you are your-

self," she said gravely. "You look entirely too dignified the way you are now. I am a little afraid of you. But I understand." An uneasy look dimmed her smiling eyes. "The Gray Phantom is a hunted man."

"As if that mattered!" he laughed lightly and stood looking at her with a longing expression. Her eyes were moist and shining. A tinge of color was already creeping up beneath the pallor of her face. She was in a simple blue dress with a gray sash, embellished with a small rosette of paler gray.

"It doesn't," she answered. "See," indicating the gray sash and the gray rosette, "I am still wearing The Gray Phantom's colors. I shall always wear them, no matter what happens. I was unjust to you the last time I saw you, Phantom Man. I felt as if a part of my life had been torn out of me. Everything has become clear since then. I understand now why you took the course you did. Can you forgive me?"

"Nothing to forgive," he murmured softly. "I am only blaming myself. I tried to compromise between good and bad, and I got out of my depth. No serious harm was done, though, except ——" His face turned grave. "Have you found any trace of your father?"

The brightness died out of her eyes. "Yes, but I lost it again. That night after I left you and Wade, I saw a man in a restaurant across the street who answered the description of Whipple. After a little he drove off in a big yellow car, and I followed him in my runabout."

"That was reckless," he said reprovingly. "Will you never learn to think before you leap?"

"You are not setting a very good example for me," she countered with a wan smile; and then she went on to relate how she had followed Whipple and how disastrously her adventure had terminated. "Whipple took me to the place where father was being kept. I don't think it is very far from here. His intention was to show me the arrangement he had devised, and to impress on me how futile it would be for any one to try to interfere with him in any way."

"Yes, I know all about that diabolical contraption," Vanardy muttered grimly. "Whipple told me. He might have been lying, but I couldn't take chances."

"He intended that I should go back and tell you what I had seen," Helen went on. "Of course he relied on the fact that I had no idea where the place was, and would never be able to find it again or direct any one to it. Just as he was about to blindfold me, I saw an old boat with the name *Tuckaway Camp* painted across the bow. Whipple didn't dare let me go back after that."

"It was an old boathouse, wasn't it?" asked Vanardy quickly.

"It seemed to be. Father was kept in a little room upstairs. I was allowed to see him only for a minute or two."

Vanardy nodded. "I know the place. I was there last evening. The upstairs room gave me the impression that it had been recently vacated."

"They didn't think it safe to keep father there any longer. I was given to understand that they had removed him to another place, but I haven't the faintest idea where it is. For that matter, I don't know where this place is. I was taken here blindfolded."

"You are in the main building of Tuckaway Camp. Yes, I know it sounds queer," he added as her eyes widened in astonishment, "but it is a fact. I should think it would be rather risky to hide a person in a place like this, but doubtless the the scoundrels know what they are doing. Wasn't William here just a few minutes before I came in?"

"The tall, stupid-looking fellow? I don't know his name, but he has been here several times, asking me the strangest lot of questions." She tossed her

head in a determined way. "He might have saved himself the trouble."

"How have they treated you?"

"Very well, but it has been rather lonesome, and I have been fearfully worried about father."

Vanardy took her hand and pressed it. "Don't worry," he said gently. "We'll find him."

He spoke with a confidence that made her smile. "I am sure you will, Phantom Man. You have never failed yet in anything you have set out to do." She looked at him whimsically, her eyes softening. "And after you have found him, what then?"

"I hope to wring the necks of Whipple and his confederates."

"And after that?"

He thought for a moment, averting his gaze as he felt her soft brown eyes fall upon him. "There's Sea Glimpse," he murmured. 'I must go back to my gardens there and do penance a while longer for my past mistakes. And I mustn't forget the little gray orchid. In a short time, if my crossbreeding system succeeds, it will be in full bloom. Don't forget you have promised to wear it next to your heart."

She smiled wistfully. He had often told her about his efforts to produce a gray orchid. For many months it had been a diversion from more serious work. When the hybrid was finally evolved, it was to be a living symbol of whatever had been good in The Gray Phantom.

"I shall, Phantom Man," she told him. "Next to my heart!"

For a little longer the whimsical smile lingered on his lips, then he awoke with a start to the present. "We mustn't stay here any longer," he said, taking her arm and leading her to the door. "I am going to take you back to New York immediately. I'll have Wade detail three of our most reliable men to keep a watch over your house night and day and see that nothing happens to you."

"Dear me!" she exclaimed. "You talk as if I were a string of pearls that had to be guarded."

"You are!" he murmured in her ear. "The most wonderful jewel in all the world. You are——"

The words ended in a half-stifled exclamation. He had just opened the door leading into the little hall in which he had left William with hands and feet bound. He stopped abruptly and swept the narrow space with an astonished glance.

William was gone.

CHAPTER XXI.

NEW COMPLICATIONS.

"WHAT's wrong?" inquired Helen, noticing his stupefaction.

"I don't like the atmosphere of this place," said Vanardy lightly, though his face was grave. "Too many mysterious things happen."

He hurried her along. William's disappearance troubled him. He was certain that he had tied the cords securely. Under the circumstances, the servant's escape seemed an augury of further surprises to come before he could reach a place of safety with the girl. The door at the other side of the little hall stood open a crack. He gave it a shove, and they stepped through, entering into the darkness of the main corridor. All the while Vanardy was cudgeling his wits to find a way of getting Helen safely away before an interruption should come.

The hall was now totally dark, although there had been a small light at the farther end less than half an hour ago. He tightened his clutch on Helen's arm. He had a curious impression that perils were lurking not far away. William's escape and the disappearance of the light struck him as danger signals. Helen's nearness and the realization that her safety depended upon him filled him with a nervous tension.

They fumbled their way through the

long, black corridor until they came to the staircase. Straight ahead of them, across the vestibule, was the outer door. Vanardy had no doubt he would find a car at the garage, but first he must provide Helen with a coat, for the air had a keen bite and she was lightly dressed. He peered sharply to all sides, feeling a nervousness which he could not account for.

Of a sudden, as they turned into the vestibule, a light flashed up in the chandelier above the door. In front of them, with legs spread far apart and a queer smile playing about his lips, stood Lieutenant Culligore. He was fully dressed, and he was handling an automatic pistol in an apparently playful way.

"Hello, Dawson," he drawled, then started slightly as he fixed his eyes on Helen. His brows arched, and he cocked an eye in a knowing way. "What's the idea? Running off with The Gray Phantom's girl? Where did you find her?"

"You overwhelm me with questions," said Vanardy complainingly. A tremor was communicated to him from the girl at his side, and his senses were instantly alert to the emergency. "This young lady must get to New York at once. I suppose I can find a car at the garage."

"Maybe so." A slow, humorous flicker appeared in Culligore's mouse-colored eyes. "There ought to be several cars over there. I didn't know you were at Tuckaway Camp, Miss Hardwick."

"Then the disadvantage is mutual," said Helen promptly. "I hadn't the faintest idea that you were here."

Vanardy, sensing a threat beneath Culligore's bland exterior, hid his confusion by looking at his watch. "Miss —er—Hardwick is in a hurry," he remarked in his carefully cultivated tone. "Will you excuse us?"

The lieutenant chuckled dryly. "Miss Hardwick is in a hurry every time I see her. A few minutes more or less can't make any difference. I wonder, Miss Hardwick, if you can tell me where a certain friend of yours is hiding himself. I mean The Gray Phantom."

Helen smiled archly. "It is strange you should put such a question to me, Lieutenant Culligore."

"Think so? Well, we've had a lot of strange talks, you and I. Won't you answer my question?"

"Gladly. I don't think The Gray Phantom is hiding. If he were, and I knew where he was, I see no reason for telling you."

"That's straight talk." Culligore contemplated her with an admiring glint in his eyes. "You never disappoint me, Miss Hardwick. I guess you know why I am looking for The Phantom?"

"I understand some people are laboring under the ridiculous misapprehension that he had something to do with the Craig murder."

"And I want to ask him straight out whether he had or not. I'll bet a pair of pink socks The Gray Phantom would tell me the truth."

"I'm sure he would, and his answer would be no."

"Maybe so." Culligore turned his lazy, mottled-gray eyes on Vanardy. There was a gleam in them that gave the object of his scrutiny an uneasy moment.

"It's a queer world," he remarked. "You haven't told me yet, Dawson, where you picked up The Gray Phantom's girl."

"I don't like your tone," said Vanardy stiffly, "and I fail to see how the matter can concern you in the least."

"It doesn't. Can't a fellow be curious? It's kind of strange to see you two together."

"I don't see anything strange about it. Please be careful how you handle that pistol. It may go off."

"It might," agreed Culligore. "You see, Dawson, it's always been a safe guess in the past that whenever Miss Hardwick bobs up in a place where

something exciting has been going on, The Gray Phantom is never far away."

"For once the guess appears to be wrong." Vanardy spoke easily, but Culligore's occasional glances in his direction filled him with apprehension. It would be decidedly awkward if the lieutenant should discover his real identity before Helen was in a safe place. "As I remarked before," he added, "Miss Hardwick is in a hurry. Must you detain us any longer?"

"Only a moment." As he spoke, Culligore performed a surprising maneuver. With an incredibly swift movement he reached out and removed Vanardy's shell-rimmed glasses, then regarded him with an amused stare.

"A pair of glasses makes a lot of difference," he observed, chuckling. "From the first I was curious to see what you would look like without them. Of course, the beard and the other things help, and your acting is a scream. Philip Dawson, eh? Private criminal investigator? It was a great little stunt, and you almost put it over. Careful now! This gat of mine is a bad actor when it gets nervous."

Vanardy glanced over his shoulder at the door, then as the pistol barrel pointed at him, and, seeing that his escape was cut off, folded his arms across his chest. Out of the corner of an eye he glanced at Helen and saw that she had turned deathly pale. He whispered something in her ear, then confronted the lieutenant with a faint smile.

"Well, Culligore, it's like old times, isn't it?" he remarked carelessly, in his natural tone. "Now that you have found me out, what are you going to do about it?"

Culligore rubbed his jaw reflectively. There was a strain of great alertness beneath his assumed listlessness. "I'm taking a bit of a vacation," he announced. "Just so I won't get rusty while loafing, I offered to give the village officials a lift on the Craig case. Of course, they swear up and down that The Gray Phantom killed Craig. Bowman, the chief constable, would pinch you this very moment if he should happen to walk in."

"But of course you aren't going to do anything so foolish?"

"Don't be too sure of that. There's a warrant out for your arrest. I'm an officer of the law, even if I happen to be taking a few days off. For a long time I've had a hankering to get The Gray Phantom. He's pulled a lot of raw jokes on me and the department, and every one of those jokes made me all the more determined to get him. Looks as though this was my chance."

"But you have no evidence."

"Oh, yes. You wrote those letters to Craig—some of them, anyhow. And don't forget that a little bit of evidence against The Gray Phantom will go a long way with a jury. Guilty or not guilty, you would have a hard time clearing yourself. It would mean a long stretch up the river, most likely. By the way," and he spoke with a studied casualness that instantly intensified Vanardy's vigilance, "what have you done to William?"

"William?" Vanardy gave a momentary start. "Oh, he and I had a little tussle. He acted in a way I didn't like, and I decided to play safe by trussing him up."

"Thought so." Culligore nodded. His face was a mask, and his wearily blinking eyes seemed yearning for sleep. Vanardy, remembering previous encounters with the lieutenant, knew that he was most dangerous when he looked like that. "Where did you leave him?" added Culligore.

"In a little hall just off the main corridor." There was a note of hesitancy in Vanardy's voice. Culligore's demeanor baffled him, and the strangeness of William's disappearance impressed him anew.

"Let's go and look," said Culligore,

making a careless motion toward the interior of the house with his pistol. "You can come along if you like, Miss Hardwick."

Reluctantly Vanardy complied and, with Helen at his side, turned into the corridor. For the present he could see no other course open to him than to humor the lieutenant. There was a subdued note of determination in Culligore's voice that brooked no opposition, and Helen's presence prompted him to act with discretion. He must proceed cautiously until he had gotten her safely away from the mysterious intrigues that seemed to center at Tuckaway Camp.

The lieutenant switched on the light, and they walked down the corridor toward the point where Vanardy had seen the evanescent streak of light while he was following William. He stopped before a door, feeling certain that it was the one the servant had entered, and placed his hand on the knob.

"Guess you're making a mistake," said Culligore. "Stanhope is sleeping in there. He might growl if you disturb him."

Vanardy gave him a surprised look. He was grinning mysteriously.

"I am sure this is the door," he declared, turning the knob. The door was locked. A blank look came into his face, but he knocked loudly on the panel. After repeated raps a voice sounded within, and soon the door was opened, and Stanhope stuck a sleepy face into the opening. At a glance into the room Vanardy saw he had made a mistake. The door William had entered opened into a small hall, at the end of which was another door. This one led directly into a bedroom. He apologized confusedly to the lawyer and proceeded bewilderly to the next door.

"Wrong again," said Culligore softly. "Craig's niece used that room when she was here, but nobody's there now."

Vanardy's head was swimming a little. The door opened readily, and he stepped in and found the light switch. Again he realized that he had blundered. There was a piano, stacks of sheet music, a sofa smothered in gayly embroidered pillows; and everything indicated that it had been used as a lounging place by a woman. He turned away, feeling Culligore's amused gaze on his face. Helen seemed as bewildered as himself. They tried several other doors, but none opened into the little hall in which his encounter with William had occurred.

"Maybe we're on the wrong floor," suggested Culligore with faint sarcasm.

Vanardy shook his head. "No, this is the floor. There must be a door somewhere that opens into a small hall."

"There must," Helen confirmed. "At the end of the hall is a little room. That's where they were keeping me."

"They? Who?" There was surprise and doubt in Culligore's tone.

After a questioning glance at Vanardy, Helen explained briefly. Culligore listened with an air of exasperating imperturbability. When she had finished he asked her to describe the room in great detail.

"Funny," he drawled when she had given the description. "I went all through the house last night, and there's no such room as that."

"You doubt my word?" demanded Helen spiritedly.

Culligore shrugged. "Show me the room, and I'll be convinced."

Vanardy turned away from an examination of the woodwork along the hall and faced the lieutenant with a perplexed frown. "It's beyond me," he confessed. "I left William trussed up in that little hall. When I came back after finding Miss Hardwick, he was gone. That's all I know. He will doubtless reappear soon, and then everything will be made clear."

Culligore grunted suspiciously. "There are a lot of queer things that need clearing up. How that room you speak of dropped out of sight all of a

sudden, for instance. I'll bet that William, if he was here, could tell us several interesting things. Had a hunch from the start that he knew who killed Craig but was keeping his mouth shut for some reason. Didn't he strike you that way, Phantom?"

"Well, he acted a bit suspiciously," said Vanardy noncommittally, "but I doubt if he knows any more about the murder of Craig than I do."

"Maybe not," agreed Culligore, with just the merest hint of a double meaning. "You might as well come across with the truth, Phantom. I believe you when you say you had a tussle with William, but it didn't come off where you say it did, and it didn't turn out quite the way you told me."

"What do you mean?" demanded Vanardy sharply, feeling as if the lieutenant's drawlingly spoken words had emitted an electric tension into the air.

"You know what I mean, all right." The automatic rose a little higher in his hand. "William was murdered about half an hour ago, and you have as good as admitted that you were the last man to see him alive. Easy, now! I've got you covered."

CHAPTER XXII.

BEHIND THE BOLTED DOOR.

A LITTLE silence came, broken at length by Helen's laugh, incredulous and a little hysterical. "How absurd!" she exclaimed.

Culligore did not answer, but he maintained a firm hold on his pistol and watched his quarry with gleeful intentness. The hall was so still that the intensified breathing of the three characters in the little drama could be heard distinctly.

Vanardy had fallen back a step as the lieutenant spoke. This latest development in a long series of surprises had a numbing effect. A medley of jarring impressions flashed through his mind; and then an old and tingling sensation, the sensation of the hunted facing the hunter, swept his mind free of the enveloping fog.

"I infer you intend to place me under arrest?" he remarked quietly.

"Well, I intend to hold you here till Bowman comes. He is bossing this job. I telephoned him a while ago, and he ought to be here any moment. I've caught you, and that satisfies me. I swore I would some day, and I'm as good as my word."

"I suppose it is useless to tell you that you are making a mistake?"

"Oh, I'm always willing to listen to reason. It'll take a lot of hard facts to convince me, though. Don't hand me any more yarns like the one you sprung a while ago."

"It was the truth."

Culligore shook his head. "It won't go down, Phantom. You can't show me the place where you tell me you had your tussle with William. There's a good reason, for there's no such place in this house. William was murdered in one of the bathrooms on the second floor. The murder was done with a knife. I'd been prowling about the house a bit, and I heard a noise coming from that direction. That's how I happened to discover the murder. William was lying on the floor in his bathrobe, with hands and feet tied. I don't think he had been dead more than a few minutes when I found him."

"And from that you deduce that I murdered him?"

"If you didn't, you have a lot to explain, and your explanations so far haven't been very satisfactory. If my hunch is right, William was murdered because some one thought he knew too much about the Craig job and was about ready to squeal. You admit yourself that you had the opportunity to kill him."

Vanardy saw the implication. The combination of motive and opportunity

had sent many a man to the electric chair, and in the case of The Gray Phantom it would have a damaging effect, even though based on the flimsiest foundation.

"And not only that," Culligore went on, as if clinching the evidence, "but you were about to beat it away from here when I caught you in the vestibule."

Vanardy saw that for the present arguments were of no avail. He glanced at Helen, saw the strain of horror and stupefaction in her face, then turned again to Culligore.

"I can't explain things that I don't understand," he pointed out, "and just now I have no time to solve riddles. Miss Hardwick is in very great danger. She fell into the hands of the same scoundrels who kidnaped her father, and they will no doubt try to get her back into their clutches. Let me take her away from here, and I give you my word of honor that I'll be back here by noon."

Culligore shook his head. "It's too thin, Phantom. Your word was always good in the past, and I might be willing to take a chance on you if you hadn't tried to string me a while ago. Mr. Stanhope will look out for Miss Hardwick, if she needs looking after."

Vanadry smiled bitterly. He could think of no one at Tuckaway Camp, with the possible exception of Culligore, to whom he was willing to intrust Helen's safety, and he trusted the lawyer least of all. Even Harry Bell, despite his eccentricities and cynicism, would have been preferable. He was about to reply, but just then Helen touched his arm.

"I stay here with you," she announced simply.

Culligore gazed at her in frank admiration for a moment, then his face fell back into its habitual impassivity. "That seems to settle it," he observed.

"You refuse?" Vanardy asked him.

"Got to," said Culligore brusquely, as if to cover up a momentary weakness. "You're too slippery to take chances with."

Vanardy gave a shrug and a nod, each of which might have indicated submission to the inevitable. "Sorry," he murmured, and then, as if catapulted forward by an invisible force, he hurled himself on the lieutenant. Helen uttered a dazed cry as she saw him leap straight at the leveled pistol. She pressed her clasped hands together, trembling with the terrifying suspense of the moment, and then she saw one man go down while another snatched her into his arms and ran. A hoarse shout sounded in the rear. She closed her eyes and surrendered herself to an ecstasy of shivers and thrills as she was carried swiftly down the corridor. The arms that held her were very strong, and they seemed to transmit a sense of security to her quivering nerves.

A hubbub sounded behind them. Doors were slamming, and there was loud shouting. Opening her eyes and glancing back, she saw a number of scurrying forms through a blur.

She gave a hysterical laugh. "It was splendid, Phantom Man!" she murmured. "Splendid!"

Vanardy, with his burden in his arms, brought up against the outer door, secured with a heavy chain. A swift glance over his shoulder revealed Culligore hurrying toward him, suddenly transformed into a bundle of fierce mental and physical energy. There was not time to undo the chain and open the door, and each second was priceless. To the side was the majestic sweep of the staircase, offering the only avenue of escape from immediate capture. In a moment he was racing upward, shielding his burden as well as he could from a possible bullet from the pursuers. She clung to him with a warm, tender tenacity that was like the confiding abandon of a child.

"Stop or I shoot!" bellowed a voice in the rear.

He hurried up the remaining steps, swinging her directly in front of him so as to protect her with his body. A bullet, aimed low and evidently with a design to cripple rather than kill, stung the stairway post as he reached the upper landing. A single thought went singing through his brain as he turned toward the door, but a form loomed suddenly in the dusk, evidently that of a servant aroused by the shouting, forcing him to make a quick turn. Again the broad sweep of the stairs, dimly illuminated by a hall light, offered him his only chance of temporary safety. There was no time to plan his movements in advance. Later he might find a way of escape over the roof and perhaps down the side of the house. The only thing that mattered now was to gain a few moments' time.

Up the stairs he sped, his pulses beating fiercely from exertion and the sheer ecstasy of flight. Again he turned blindly toward a door, but it was locked. He tried another, but it refused to open, and already an approaching din warned him that the pursuers would soon be at his heels. Luckily there were no lights up here, and the danger of being struck by a bullet was correspondingly less. Again he turned toward the stairs, but a scurrying form intervened. Something clutched at his legs, but he shook it off with a vigorous kick. Escape in the direction of the remaining flight of stairs was cut off, so he turned again into the hall, dashing down its length until he came to a door. The nearest of the pursuers were only a few feet behind, and the door was his only chance of evading immediate capture. It opened readily, and in a moment he was inside, slamming it shut in the face of the leader of the pursuit.

With an exclamation of relief he let Helen slide from his arms, then quickly shot the bolt. But his relief, he well knew, was only temporary. Unless there should be a second door, or a window offering easy access to the roof or to the ground, his capture was only a question of moments. Already there was a tumultuous pounding on the door, warning him that an attempt to force it would be made before long.

Helen was trembling violently, though he knew it was from excitement rather than fear, and for a little he stood beside her, steadying her.

"Won't they break in the door?" she asked as they listened to the din outside.

"We'll be away from here before they do," he assured her, voicing a hope he was far from feeling. "Wait here a moment."

He groped along the wall, fumbling for an electric switch in the hope that the light might reveal a convenient exit. He found a knob, pressed it, and then, as the light flared up, a gasp of astonishment escaped him. A little dazed, he ran his eyes over a familiar scene. The door he had entered at random while seeking a way of escape in the dark had led him into the blue room, the chamber of mystery that had been the scene of Craig's death.

"Open, or we smash the door!" bellowed a voice on the outside.

Helen, smiling bravely, looked into his troubled eyes, as if seeking an explanation of the startled look that had leaped into his face the moment he recognized the surroundings. Without a word he hurried across the floor, parted the shutters, raised the window, and looked down upon a sheer expanse of wall. It was at least thirty feet to the ground, a dizzying plunge. With Helen in mind, Vanardy could not contemplate it without a shudder.

She stepped over to him, laid a hand on his shoulder, and pointed to where the horizon was streaked with gray, luminous wisps, heralding the approach of dawn.

"Look, Phantom Man!" she murmured. "There are your colors in the sky. Oh, those beautiful streaks of gray creeping up out of the blackness! It's a good sign."

Vanardy smiled, but a fresh onslaught on the door made him turn. Absently, while cudgeling his wits for a safe way of escape, he closed the window and the shutters. Alone, he might have attempted the hazardous drop from the window, but with Helen it was impossible. Neither could he leave her behind, although she had nothing to fear from Culligore, for the blackguardly ruffians represented by Whipple were probably at this very moment hatching new plots against her safety. Doubtlessly they were by this time desperate enough for any infamy.

A violent crash sounded at the door. Evidently the men outside were ramming a heavy object against the panels. Any moment the door might collapse. Despairingly Vanardy looked about the room, his eyes coming to rest on the fireplace, with its accumulation of dead ashes in the grate and the huge stone slab in front. There seemed to be no way of escape anywhere, only solid walls that mocked him with their impregnability. For once, it seemed, The Gray Phantom was hopelessly at bay. The din outside the door, growing in violence every moment, appeared to be sounding the dirge of his final defeat.

Suddenly his head went up. A new thought came with startling vividness. The murderer of Craig had found a way out of this very room. He had made his exit without using either the door or the window, for both had been securely locked when the servants broke in. It stood to reason there must be an exit of some sort, so ingeniously hidden that the most careful search had failed to reveal it. A new, faint hope sang a grimly exultant tune within him. The uproar at the door was a challenge to The Gray Phantom's wits. The trust and faith shining in Helen's brown eyes was another. If an exit was to be found, The Gray Phantom would find it.

A new crash and a splintering sound drew his eyes again to the door. A few more powerful thrusts, and the heavy panels would collapse. His glance slanted downward, in the direction of the narrow rift at the sill which he had pointed out to Bell. It seemed incongruous, but the shadowy suspicion that had dawned in his mind when he found it kept tantalizing his imagination.

Another thunderous crash came, warning him that the crisis was at hand. Bowman must have arrived, and probably he had brought several officers along, for it sounded as if a dozen men were participating in the commotion. Doubtless they all felt certain that there was no escape for The Gray Phantom this time. Vanardy, absently jingling a few coins in his pocket, felt anew the challenge to his resourcefulness.

Helen came forward, her eyes bright and tender. "I want you to know," she whispered, "that, whatever happens, I have faith in you."

He smiled, and then a vaguely puzzled look came into his face. Of a sudden he became aware that the coins in his pocket were producing a discordant sound. It was a trivial thing in comparison with the terrific tension of the moment, but he was in the state of mind where minor details are magnified. A moment longer he listened to the one false note in the clinking of the coins as he rattled them in his pocket, and then he drew out a small handful of silver. Among the rest was the little Chinese brass coin.

He stared down at it with a dull, wondering expression, vaguely conscious of Helen's puzzled look, and then a white, dazzling light of comprehension seemed to leap up before his eyes.

A loud, splintering roar sounded at the door. Helen crept closer to him, her hand nestling within his arm. For an instant both stared at the door, momentarily expecting it to crash in. Then, with unwonted brusqueness, he disengaged his arm. He dropped the coins back into his pocket—all but the Chinese brass piece.

"We'll win yet!" he exclaimed, springing forward with a light and eager step.

"I just knew it!" cried Helen. "The Gray Phantom always wins!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

WHEN THE DOOR GAVE.

AT length, with a hard, splitting crack, the heavy oak panel collapsed and fell inward. Bowman, stout and red-visaged, mopped his perspiring face and, reaching a hand through the opening, slipped back the bolt and turned the key in the lock. At a twist on the knob the door flew open.

The constable and Culligore entered simultaneously. Behind them followed two village officers, a couple of half-dressed and hysterical servants, and finally Harry Bell and the lawyer. The latter two had merely looked on while the door was being besieged.

Culligore came forward with a briskness oddly out of keeping with his habitual dragging gait. He swept the room with a single glance, then came to a dead stop. With equal abruptness Bowman halted in his tracks and stood gaping and pop-eyed.

"He's—gone!" said Culligore in a dazed tone.

"Gone!" echoed Bowman in a small, throaty voice that contrasted ludicrously with his sturdy build. For several seconds the two stared at each other, then Bowman pulled himself together and bawled an order to his subordinates to guard the door.

"Betcha we'll get him yet," he stoutly declared. "The scalawag can't have got out of the room. Look! Them shutters are locked, an' we know he didn't get out through the door. Old Nick himself can't get out of a place that there's no way out of."

"You're flattering Old Nick when you compare him with The Gray Phantom," remarked Bell, edging forward.

Ignoring him, Bowman went bustling about the room, looking under the bed and searching the dressing cabinet and the clothes press. Culligore assisted, but only in a half-hearted way, as if realizing that it was wasted effort.

"Looks as though he's given us the slip," he remarked when every conceivable portion of the room had been searched.

Bowman rubbed his battling jaw and scowled heavily.

"What did you expect?" drawled Bell, calmly lighting a cigarette. "Don't you know that getting out of tight corners is The Gray Phantom's favorite diversion?"

"Well, it was a regular Phantom getaway, all right."

"Did you tell me that there was a young lady with him?" inquired Stanhope, looking somewhat ill at ease in his incomplete attire.

"Miss Hardwick. Where she came from Heaven only knows. I caught them in the vestibule as they were about to slip out. Say, you," addressing one of the servants who stood shivering in the doorway, "run out to the garage and see if any one of the cars is missing."

The servant withdrew. Bowman looked suspiciously into the dim corners of the room, as if not yet ready to accept the staggering fact that The Phantom had escaped. Stanhope demonstrated his passion for regularity by adjusting the fender, which had been jarred a few inches out of its place before the grate. Bell made himself comfortable in an armchair.

"Has it occurred to you," remarked the lawyer, "that in making this extraordinary exit The Phanton only duplicated the escape of Craig's murderer? You brilliant detectives have not yet figured out how the murderer left the room—or how he entered, for that matter. Doubtless The Phantom followed the same method of departure as was used by the murderer."

Bell gave him an amused glance. "That makes everything perfectly clear, doesn't it? Just show us how it was done, and the mystery will be cleared up."

Culligore's eyes were fixed on Stanhope in a meditative way. "You almost hit the nail on the head that time, Mr. Stanhope. I agree with you that The Phantom probably got out the same way as the murderer did. What puzzles me is this: Half a dozen people have searched this room for a hidden exit, including myself. We didn't find even so much as a mousehole. The Phantom wasn't in here more than ten or fifteen minutes before he found a way out. How do you explain it?"

With a shrewd look in his eyes he searched the faces in the room.

"That's easy," said Bell. "The Phantom happens to be just a little bit cleverer than the rest of us, including myself and you."

"I perceive the drift of your remarks," said Stanhope to the lieutenant. "You mean to imply that The Phantom knew the way out all the time. In other words, when he made his escape from this room a few minutes ago, he merely went back over the same trail he covered the night of the murder. To put it plainly, The Phantom is the murderer."

"Exactly, Mr. Stanhope. Ever since the murder I've been telling myself that when I found somebody who knew a way out of this room other than the door and the window, I would have found the man that murdered Craig. Good logic, eh?"

"Logic is rot," declared Bell in a drawl.

Culligore was warming up to his argument. "A little while ago I wasn't dead sure that The Phantom killed Craig, in spite of the letters he wrote and all the other evidence. Now I'm sure. The Phantom convicted himself when he gave us the slip a few minutes ago. He proved to us then that he knows a way out of this room that nobody else knows."

"An interesting argument, but rather loosely constructed," was the lawyer's comment. "You must admit it is conceivable that more than one person is familiar with the secret exit."

"It's conceivable, all right, but not very likely. There isn't more than one chance in a million that any one else knows about the other exit. And I'll go one step farther. I'll bet a pair of pink socks that the person who killed Craig killed William, too."

His eyes, with a hint of a challenge in them, swept the faces of the listeners. They tarried for a moment on the lawyer's fine, dark countenance. Stanhope was plainly ill at ease, but probably he was uncomfortably conscious of the deficiencies in his dress. Culligore's brows curved upward as the lawyer's eyes lowered beneath his gaze, but whatever perplexities he felt were interrupted by the return of the servant who had been sent to the garage. He reported that one of the cars, a high-powered sedan, was missing.

Bowman growled under his breath, then obtained a description of the car and hurried out in search of a telephone.

Stanhope rocked reflectively on his heels. His black eyes were quite tranquil again, and he faced Culligore with an affable smile. "Of course," he remarked, "some of us have suspected all along that The Gray Phantom killed my client. Your argument is a little shaky, but on the whole it affords strong collateral proof. I was surprised when

you told me a little while ago that Philip Dawson was none other than The Phantom, yet I had my suspicions about the fellow from the start. Why do you suppose he came back here in disguise?"

"Because it wasn't safe for him to come back here any other way."

"But why did he come back at all?"

Culligore scowled. "Don't ask me why The Phantom does this or that. He always has a good reason, but his reasons are hard to understand. I don't know exactly why he killed Craig."

"You're going too fast," Bell interrupted. "I hate to rip up a fine argument, but yours has a hole in it big enough for an elephant to step through. Don't think I'm trying to plug for The Gray Phantom. He can take care of himself. If he's guilty, I hope you convict him. That would let me out."

"Nobody has accused you, Bell," the lieutenant reminded him.

"But some people have been doing some tall thinking. I'd be glad to see The Phantom jugged just because it would clear little old Harry Bell. No use going off half-cocked, though. Maybe The Phantom killed Craig, but your argument doesn't prove he did."

"How so?"

"Your idea is that The Phantom convicted himself when he demonstrated that he knows a secret way out of this room. Well, evidently he does, but so does another person."

"Who?" asked Culligore sharply.

"Don't know his name. Let me tell you something. I came up to this room to-night, along about three o'clock, to pay our friend Dawson a visit. I found him groggy from a tap on the bean. He had been badly mussed up, too. His glasses had been knocked off, and his beard didn't look just right. Well, I saw at a glance that Dawson was The Gray Phantom. It gave him a little shock, I guess, to be recognized, but I told him he needn't worry on my account. Then he told me what had happened, or as much as he knew of it or cared to tell. It began with three raps on the door, just as the night Craig was murdered. The Phantom opened it, of course, but there was no one in the hall, and the first thing he knew the light went out, and he heard a voice back in the corner. I don't know the details after that, but when he let me in he was the sorriest looking sight I ever laid eyes on. Doesn't that look as though somebody else knew a secret way in and out of this room?"

Culligore seemed impressed, but in a moment he chuckled derisively. "The Phantom was only throwing dust in your eyes. He handed you a cock-and-bull story. I'm surprised you fell for it, Bell."

"Yes Just think a moment. His wooziness might have been only a bit of good acting, but would he have mussed up his disguise just to throw dust in my eyes? Is that reasonable? Remember that he was masquerading as Philip Dawson, and that there was no reason for him to come out in the open as The Gray Phantom."

Culligore thought for a moment, then shook his head. "It looks queer, just the same. I'll bet a pair of pink socks The Phantom put one over on you. Why was he masquerading here as Philip Dawson? Where did Miss Hardwick bob up from all of a sudden? Why did The Phantom try to string me about leaving William trussed up in a place that nobody ever saw or heard of? If he didn't kill Craig, who did?"

Bell shrugged wearily. He moved his glance from Culligore's face and fixed Stanhope with an impudent, half humorous stare.

"Ever hear such a lot of silly questions, Stanhope?" he drawled. "Maybe you will answer the last one?"

The lawyer stiffened abruptly. A wave of pallor rushed across his finely molded features. He tried to mask his confusion with a smile while framing

a suitable reply, but just then an interruption came from the door. One of Bowman's deputies announced that Lieutenant Culligore was wanted on the telephone.

When he was gone, Bell stretched out his legs. There was an illegible smile on his lips, a queer twinkle in his half shut eyes. The lawyer, standing with his back to the fireplace, seemed at ease once more.

"You are quite a humorist, Bell," he said genially.

Bell looked up at him with a yawn. "Thanks for the compliment, old top. You've got a queer idea of humor, though. A humorist is a fellow who cracks jokes."

"Well, weren't you joking?"

Bell chuckled. "I never saw a man turn as white at a joke as you did at that one, Stanhope. And you didn't answer the question."

A little pause fell. The lawyer's black eyes bored into Bell's face, but there was a smile on his lips. "If I should attempt to answer it," he said evenly, "I might suggest that, granting The Gray Phantom did not kill Craig, and that you did not——"

"What about yourself?" Bell interrupted bluntly.

The lawyer's smile grew a little blander. "As you please. Granting that neither The Phantom, yourself, nor I killed Craig, there is still another possibility. It may be that the man who committed the murder is dead."

"Oh, you mean William? He was a queer cuss, Stanhope, almost as queer as yourself. But you're spoiling Culligore's beautiful theory. He thinks William was bumped off because he knew who killed Craig and was ready to squeal."

"There may be something in that," the lawyer conceded, "but——"

Culligore's return interrupted him. The lieutenant looked a little flustered.

"I've just had The Gray Phantom on the long distance," he announced. His tones sounded a bit dazed. "He promised to come back here before night and pay us a visit."

To be concluded in next week's issue of the DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE.

NEEDED REFORMS IN LAW AND JUSTICE

FOUR hundred leaders of the judiciary and bar were recently gathered in conference at Washington to discuss the present condition of the administration of judicial justice in the United States. Elihu Root, international lawyer and former Secretary of State, declared that American jurisprudence is staggering around in a vast swamp of decisions and statutes which is growing deeper and broader year by year. He urged an immediate restating and simplification of the law of the land.

The conference will establish an American Law Institute for the purpose of restating the law. Mr. Root, permanent chairman of the conference, declared that the confusion and uncertainty attending the practice of the law is increasing daily. During the five years preceding 1914, 60,000 new statutes were enacted, and 65 decisions rendered. Statutes and decisions are piling up at an incredible rate, and he pictured the legal profession as burdened with "a little old man of the sea."

Digest and encyclopedias of the law now in existence, are of little value. The need is for a great work done in a great way. "More speed must be put into the work of reform, so that those who stand in the way will get out for fear of getting hurt," he declared.

The Police of Portland, Oregon

WITH the exception of Saint Joseph, Missouri, each city claims for its police force the merit and honor of being the best. Few, if any, can claim this with more justice than can Portland, Oregon. There has been no disruption of efficiency by politics; and, during the last ten years especially, three chiefs have added to the value of the department and brought greater security to the town.

Mr. Leon V. Jenkins, the present chief, is trim, muscular—almost a young man; in manner he is alert and courteous. He is especially interested in the automobile. Recognizing the great weapon it has been in the hands of crookdom, he also points out the opportunities it offers for law-enforcement officers, and he prophesies that this, the crooks greatest friend, will be his greatest enemy. He advocates the training of men for the special work of catching the gentry who use cars.

Another modern method he suggests and is putting into practice is that of establishing posts at several points in the residence section. As a trial these are located at fire stations, and an automobile and a motor cycle are at instant call at each station. This is a step toward abolishing foot patrol, which he believes is inevitable. Undoubtedly this would help the situation.

Foreseeing occasions when the force might not be sufficient, when the delay of calling State troops might be disastrous, Chief Jenkins and Mayor Baker organized a vigilance committee of about 100 men of standing, to be subject to call. These men were given real work just a few weeks ago. There was a longshoremen's strike on, and many members of the I. W. W. were fostering trouble. It was reported that large numbers were flocking to Portland to air their theories of economy and government. The entire police force, together with the emergency men, was assembled, and without warning every "Wobbly" was arrested, and those who could not show residence were warned to leave the city. The invasion was halted, and Portland remained peaceful. The chief is fortunate in having a loyal force that is composed of an unusually large percentage of veteran officers. The day shift is largely made up of men of ten years' standing or more, and it is in charge of John T. Moore, who has been captain more than twenty years.

There are 357 in the department, of whom 310 are patrolmen. The Portland "flattie" still wears the blue helmet that has been the style in police circles for so many years. The traffic officers have not yet adopted the tan uniforms so common these days, but they still wear the blue. Detectives are "inspectors" in Portland.

Scarred Evidence

by Frederick C. Davis

Author of "Pasted Words," "Little Invisible," etc.

ABOVE Nichols a sheer wall of brick, the rear side of the Hotel Baltimore, rose blackly toward the star-sprinkled sky. An iron fire escape hung from the wall, ending in a low, hinged ladder. Four stories above, directly behind a platform of the fire escape, a lighted window gleamed into the darkness. As the watcher saw it his eyes narrowed to slits.

Nichols lost no time. He gripped the ladder, swung himself up, and crouched unseen on the lowest step of the fire escape. Stealthily ascending the ladder he passed the first, second, third platforms. As he gripped the rungs leading to the fourth floor his heart thumped heavily.

He touched a bulge at his hip and knew that his gun was still safely in place. Breathing quickly, with suppressed emotion, he carefully ascended the last ladder. His objective window was open. As he slowly raised his head over the edge of the platform a rumble of thunder sounded. He snatched a view of the room behind the window.

Two men moved about inside. Nichols' breath came in a quick, emotional gasp. Yes; one of them was Gilmore. Gilmore, the stone-hearted dick!

As Nichols watched he bared his revolver. Its barrel was abnormally long; over the end of it was fitted a silencer.

Gilmore, in the room, had been lying on the bed. He struggled up, clasping his head with his hands. His companion spoke to him.

"I'm going down to get a cigar, Harry. I'll be gone only a minute. I hope you're feeling better when I get back, old man."

Gilmore nodded as the other left the room. In his shirt sleeves, collarless, hair ruffled, he walked into the bathroom, which stood off to the right. At this movement the eyes of the man on the fire escape blazed. Nichols couldn't have wished anything better!

In a flash he mounted the platform, raised the window, and slipped silently into the room. From the bathroom came the rippling of running water. Nichols wasted not a moment; he lowered the window again, stepped quickly into a clothes closet, and shut the door within a few inches. As the door settled to rest Gilmore reëntered the room.

Nichols breathed shortly. His heart pounded. In his clenched, white-knuckled hand he gripped his silenced gun. He listened with acute attention. Now was his time to act!

With startling suddenness he viciously kicked the door open. At the crash Gilmore whirled and gasped. His hand darted instinctively toward his hip.

"Don't!" Nichols cracked out.

Gilmore's hand halted. Nichols stepped from the closet with his gun leveled unwaveringly at Gilmore's forehead. His eyes were narrow and gleaming; his teeth were bared in a mirthless grin.

Gilmore straightened, and eyes lighted with recognition. "Oh!" he said smoothly. "It's 'Rat' Nichols, isn't it?"

"It is!" Nichols snapped out.

"You're a forger, aren't you? I remember you now. I sent you up for forging some of the company's checks."

Nichols' red-shot eyes glared malignantly.

"You needn't worry," Gilmore said. "My gun isn't in my pocket holster. It isn't comfortable to lie on, you know."

Nichols' fierce, long pent-up emotions broke furiously loose. His face flashed a moist, livid scarlet; his hands trembled; his neck swelled. Moisture glistened over his working skin. He glowered with consuming hatred at Gilmore.

"You skunk!" he said snarlingly, lowering his quivering voice with great difficulty. "You dog! I hate you!"

"Well, it's your own——"

Gilmore's interruption was abruptly cut off by a sharp, metallic click. He had raised his hand in a warning gesture; it stopped, stiff. His eyes, which had been directed at Nichols, rolled toward the ceiling. His forehead had been white and smooth; instantly upon the sounding of the click a round hole jumped into its very center. Then Gilmore's knees bended under him. He fell to the floor. He lay limp, motionless, and unbreathing. Nichols' shot had killed him instantly.

Nichols stared at the limp form on the floor with malicious triumph. He gazed long at Gilmore's unmoving chest. Yes, Gilmore was undeniably dead!

Then he recovered himself with a start. He had won—won! But he must get away; at any moment the detective's companion might return.

He stepped to the window. Below him a square of lighted street was visible. As Nichols pressed his face against the pane, staring at the end of the alley below, a form moved across the lighted space. The other man was returning.

Immediately Nichols resumed his planned movements. He crawled onto the fire escape; then quickly and silently descended the ladders and dropped to the dark pavement below. He was perspiring freely; he rubbed vigorously with his handkerchief at his nose, which itched tantalizingly. When a small boy Nichols had fallen upon a bit of glass which had cut the tip of his nose; the scar it had left was visible at only very close range, but when Nichols perspired the drawn scar itched with annoying persistency. Nichols' rough rubbing of his nose stopped the itching for a moment.

Nichols went at once to the entrance of the hotel. The other man entered just before him. With assumed nonchalance he lounged about until Gilmore's companion stepped into the elevator. Then, to further carry out his scheme, he stepped to the desk.

"I don't think much of your poolroom," Nichols told the clerk.

"Why?"

"I've been playing there a couple of hours, but every cue in the place is warped. It's this damp weather, I guess, that causes it. It is certainly going to rain."

Just behind the desk stood the telephone switchboard of the hotel. Nichols eyed the board keenly and located a signal light numbered forty-five. It would not be long before that light would begin to blaze! Even as he found it, it jumped into flickering brilliance.

The operator made connection. As she listened her face blanched. She sat stiff and inactive. Then she swung around, her eyes wide.

"Get that call!" she gasped out at the amazed desk clerk.

As the clerk listened his face, too, went a deathly white. Nichols watched him grimly, and sauntered away. He knew what had happened. A man had been found murdered in room No. 45!

Nichols selected an easy-chair in the lobby of the very hotel in which he had just committed murder, and watched. The frantic clerk called the house detective; together they hastened to the floor above. After an interval another call came buzzing through the switchboard. Nichols knew, as well as though he were the operator, that the second

call from room No. 45 was to police headquarters.

A silence fell over the lobby. Nichols passed a half hour of strained idleness, his nerves stretched to tautness, his brain working. His plan of revenge was almost complete! He was getting away clean!

No other man on earth did Nichols hate so profoundly as the man he had killed. Years before Nichols had been employed as a trusted clerk in the office of a large department store. Many checks passed through his hands, bearing the signature of the senior partner of the firm. It was a simple signature; it hadn't been hard work. Nichols had dexterously signed the firm member's name to different checks of comfortable amounts; and these forged checks he readily cashed.

They came back from the bank to Nichols, and he had destroyed them. That is, he thought he had destroyed them. In reality several telltale bits remained in his wastebasket. Gilmore had been called in; had found the bits of torn checks in Nichols' basket, and——

The detective wouldn't listen, of course! He didn't care whether a man was up against it, with nothing but a clerk's salary! A dick supposes a man forges for the love of it! That was what had kindled Nichols' intense hate toward Gilmore. His pleading had had no effect on the detective. Gilmore had listened to too many "sob stories."

Years of imprisonment had followed for Nichols. Years of drab, confined movements, hampering, killing, smothering! Why, how could a man *live* in one of those stone rat traps? He couldn't! Memories of that jail had haunted and tortured Nichols.

Now angered at the thought, Nichols rubbed his itching nose with his handkerchief until it flamed a brilliant red.

He had planned this murder so that he might entirely escape suspicion. Of course, he had guarded against leaving finger prints by wearing rubber gloves. The clerk would testify that Nichols had gone to a pool room which the clerk had himself suggested. And what murderer would be so bold as to take a room almost opposite that of the man he intended to kill and return to it after the crime? For Nichols had rented a room on the fourth floor almost opposite Gilmore's. Certainly suspicion was not likely to fall upon him.

No one in the hotel knew of Nichols' criminal record, or of his hatred for Gilmore. Only Gilmore had known that —and Gilmore was dead! Yes, Nichols had played absolutely safe.

He passed a second tremulous half hour. Finally he arose to go to his room. The elevator carried him to the fourth floor. As he slowly passed the door of room No. 45 he heard voices inside. Nichols entered his own room. He pulled a suit case, already packed, from under his bed.

He had won! And now he was leaving the city.

Carrying his suit case, he went at once to the lobby and stopped at the desk. His train, he told the clerk in a mild conversational tone, left in twenty minutes—the twelve-thirty for Chicago. It seemed as though it were going to rain, too; the dampness made Nichols' nose itch. In a fit of chumminess he related to the clerk the incident in his childhood of how he had acquired the scar. The nervous clerk did not mention the crime in room No. 45, of course. Yes, Nichols had played absolutely safe. Smiling triumphantly, he stepped outside.

He hailed a taxi and directed the driver to carry him to the Union Depot. He had made Gilmore pay—Gilmore, the heartless dog! He had made him pay dearly for those long, torturous years he had spent in a killing cell. Why, Nichols' sentence had taken a slice out of the very heart of his life! Yes, Gilmore had paid, and Nichols was glad of it!

Unconsciously he glanced back in the direction of the hotel. As he looked a man ran from the entrance of the building and hastily climbed into a waiting taxi. A chill tingled Nichols' heart as he saw the taxi lurch off in the same direction as he was taking. He reassured himself over a silly fear; looked ahead again and forgot the taxi in his exultation.

Blocks on he again looked back. The taxi was still following! Nichols laughed nervously to himself; it was merely some one else taking the same train as he, of course.

At the Union Depot he bought several magazines and boarded the smoker. He settled back comfortably, raised the window, and allowed the cool breezes to play over his perspiring face. He rubbed his itching nose briskly—it was itching like the very devil! Nichols opened a magazine and lost himself in a strangely fascinating tale of spring and romance.

The train finally pulled out. A man came and seated himself in the seat opposite him, but Nichols knew it only vaguely. The wind blew coolly against his warm face, and his nose ceased itching. The train rumbled along at a swift rate. It did not even occur to Nichols to find relief in the increasing number of miles stretching between himself and the scene of his crime; he was quite sure that he was perfectly safe, anyway.

He finished his story and looked out the window. Then he glanced at the man seated opposite him, and every drop of color fled from his face.

The man was the other inmate of room No. 45—the companion of Detective Gilmore!

He was looking out the black window beside them. Nichols fought to thrust down his rising fears. What was this man doing here? Why had he left the hotel so soon? Had he followed him on suspicion? No, no! Nichols was sure suspicion could not possibly fasten on him.

Gilmore's companion was now busily readily a newspaper. Nichols, tremendously nervous, attempted to read again, but his eyes roamed disinterestedly over the type. The sense of impending danger in him was swelling to terrifying proportions.

At that moment a rush of rain dropped from the dark sky and lashed through the open window, sprinkling both men with moisture. Nichols sprang up and pushed the window shut. Outside the rain beat viciously against the pane, sending distorting trickles flowing downward. The man opposite Nichols brushed the water from his trousers.

"Some sudden downpour!" he exclaimed laughingly.

Nichols managed with difficulty to pronounce: "It sure was."

The other raised his newspaper, but lowered it again at once. "Sometimes," he observed, "newspapers are a bane. They're filled with the sorrows of life. They're full of fights and strikes and famines. Sometimes they make me positively sick. They're always filled with political muck, scandal, and killings. Sometimes—these things strike home."

"How do you mean?" Nichols asked nervously, with attempted solicitation. "You—you've had a bereavement?"

The other peered sharply at Nichols, who slowly, painfully flushed. "My best friend was murdered to-night," he said slowly.

Nichols pushed his eyebrows up. "Murdered?" he asked, in feigned surprise.

"Yes, murdered! Shot down! Killed by some sneaking snake who crept into his room at the hotel and shot him in cold blood!"

Nichols managed to mouth: "Have—have they found the murderer?"

"No, they haven't. But I'm going to get him. I'm going to get him! I'll get him if it takes the rest of my life to do it!"

Nichols coughed rackingly. He felt

a wild desire to fling open the window and throw himself out. With difficulty he held himself in his chair.

A conductor entered the coach and called the name of a nearing station.

"It appalls me!" the other stated. "How can one man take the life—the very life—of another?"

"I—I—I don't know!"

The train slackened speed; halted a moment; then puffingly it resumed its traveling. The man opposite stared, lost in meditation, out the bleared window. The train chugged ahead for several minutes. Then, quickly, it began to slow again.

"What's this?" the other man asked. "There isn't another station here, is there?"

The inwardly tumultuous Nichols shrugged his shoulders. He was tremendously miserable. Gilmore's companion craned his neck to peer out the window behind him. Unable to see outside, he asked: "Look ahead for me, won't you, and see if we're coming to another station? I can't see backward; and I don't want to get lost on a night like this!"

Nichols stared ahead into the darkness. He pressed his face closely against the glass in order to see as far as possible. His face was warm, and its moisture adhered to the pane. He could see nothing in the great gulf of blackness outside.

"There's no station here," he mumbled. "The train's starting again, anyway."

"So it is," agreed the other, and settled back.

A white-coated boy appeared in the coach, carrying a basket of confections and crying his wares. As he passed, Gilmore's companion signaled him.

"Got any marshmallows?"

"Yezzir." The boy sold a package of marshmallows to the man opposite Nichols. He opened it, disclosing a pile of white candies. "Have some candy?"

Nichols declined intolerantly. He didn't want candy! He was uneasy, stirred with misgivings. He wanted to ask this man the nature of his trip; why he had left so soon after the crime; where he was going; if he had any suspicions. These suppressed questions maddened Nichols. He was very thirsty, and his nose was beginning to itch again. Above all, he wanted to get away from that darned detective!

As he began to rise the other suddenly raised a hand and halted him. "Wait a minute!" he said sharply.

Nichols sank weakly back, breathing painfully. The other eyed him keenly for a moment.

"I want to show you something," he said softly.

Nichols dazedly watched as the man opposite him removed the marshmallows from the box one by one, tapped the powdered sugar from them, and tossed them away.

Nichols attempted to rise again. "I'm thirsty!" he said growlingly. "What's this foolishness——"

"Wait!" the other snapped out at him again. Nichols looked into blazing eyes.

The stranger wadded his handkerchief and scattered the powdered sugar over it. He raised the powdered wad of cloth, and with quick, long sweeps swabbed it over the pane of the window between them.

Nichols watched these enigmatic movements dazedly.

Beneath the moving handkerchief, on the windowpane, a blurred image formed. The powder was making visible the smudge Nichols' face had made when he had pressed it against the glass. The powdered sugar clung to the perspiration and whitened it. As he finished he glared at Nichols.

Nichols laughed mirthlessly, brokenly. "What's that darned thing?"

"It's this!" was the cutting reply. "That smudge on the pane is the print of your face. There's your flattened

nose. See the ridge your scar makes? See it? It's plain!

"To-night my pal was murdered. On the windowpane of that room I found a smudge. I brought it out with powder. The nose of the man who had pressed his face against that window—the nose of the man who killed my pal—is scarred, *just as yours is scarred!* The print on this pane and the print on the window of room No. 45 are identical!"

Nichols sprang to a half-standing position, his face scarlet, his eyes flashing. "You lie!" he thundered.

"I don't lie! The instant I found that smudge on the window of room No. 45 I went to the desk clerk. He told me a man with a scarred nose had just left for Chicago on the twelve-thirty. Thank Heaven, I caught this train! Careful, now. The man across the aisle from you is the house detective. We've got you now!"

Nichols' wide, bleared eyes stared down the bore of a revolver held in the detective's white-knuckled hand.

"We've got you! And caught you with a nose print!"

The world swam around Nichols. He stared with sickened reproach at the stickly smudge on the windowpane.

"You got me!" he groaned. "I—I did it!"

IN NEXT WEEK'S ISSUE:

THE WATER TEST

Some think the motive which prompts the commission of a crime the most interesting feature of a detective story, others the method used by the criminal, while still another class of readers are more absorbed in how the detective solves the mystery. Well, "The Water Test" will please all lovers of detective stories, as all three of these features play dominant parts in this story. Here is a detective story that is a detective story in every sense of the word.

By JOHN JAY CHICHESTER

NOTHING FOR NOTHING

The old jewelry clerk knew his business and he knew crooks. One day, a beautifully gowned woman—well, read the story.

By ROLAND KREBS

ABRACADABRA

Proves that a detective must know more than his A B C's.

By SCOTT CAMPBELL

AND OTHER STORIES

BE SURE TO ORDER YOUR COPY IN ADVANCE

How California Catches Criminals

AN agency for suppressing crime, that never makes an arrest, that never even comes into personal contact with the lawbreaker, sounds like a paradox. Such an agency is an important part of the California law-enforcing machinery. It is the "State Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation," of which C. S. Morrill is superintendent.

It is located in Sacramento not far from the capitol. In one room, thirty or forty feet long, are assembled most of the criminal records of the State. Thither Los Angeles, San Francisco, Eureka, Fresno, and all the other towns and cities send their crime reports. Eighty thousand finger prints have been filed in this central clearing house, and each month about three thousand prints come in for comparison and classification.

There are portraits by the thousand, and prison records and signatures and tabulations and analyses by the tens of thousands. There are photographs of the bad checks that cost California merchants millions of dollars yearly.

The value of the bureau to the various police departments is in the admirable arrangements of the records. It is based on the well-known fact that crooks usually follow one line of endeavor; hence each crime specialty is recorded separately.

If Santa Rosa has a bank robbery, the Sacramento Bureau can instantly supply full details of all gentry in the bank-robbing business, and by elimination the guilty ones can be pretty closely guessed at. The chase and conviction is left to the police. If there is a series of filling station hold-ups in the San Joaquin Valley, every sheriff can obtain a list of suspects. Or, if a new gang is working, and there is no record of them, every report adds something to the description and methods, until there is enough for identification.

Mr. Morrill takes advantage of the crook's habit of using the same method in each of his "jobs," and he can instantly find the names of all that rent rooms near the scene of an intended burglary, or of those that work by twos or threes, or of those that work alone.

His records are constantly being added to as information comes in. If an old partnership in crime is broken up or a new one formed, that fact finds its proper place in the files.

San Diego may have a man in jail on a misdemeanor charge; Mr. Morrill's records reveal the fact that he is wanted on a more serious charge in Oregon. Bakersfield has some finger prints; Mr. Morrill tells who is the man that fits them. Santa Cruz reports a creamery safe job by an unknown; Mr. Morrill may be able to send a photograph of the robber. Red Bluffs wants a man, but the only distinctive clew is a scar on the left cheek; Mr. Morrill has a record of criminals with such scars.

Though comparatively a young man, Mr. Morrill has made his bureau widely known among police officials by this clever use of records. Working with him are a finger-print expert, a handwriting expert, and four or five typists—all of them filing experts. A few minutes' or an hour's research uncovers information that brings many a criminal to justice.

MISSING

This department, conducted in duplicate in DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE and WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, thus giving readers double service, is offered free of charge to our readers. Its purpose is to aid them in getting in touch with persons of whom they have lost track.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable.

If it can be avoided, please do not send us a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that those persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

Now, readers, help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

A. J. K., JR.—Please write us direct; tell us about everything and future plans. Let us have your address so that mother can write you whenever she wishes; we have missed your letters terribly; we are for you of course, and we want to keep in touch with you always.

LAWTON, EDWARD M.—Please write to your mother. Everything has been done for the best. Your address will not be given to any one, but please write. F. W. L.

LE ROUX, ANDREW.—Please send your address to Mildred le Roux, care of this magazine. Letters sent to you have been returned.

REED, MARGUERITE.—Please send your present address to Hugh Morgan, care of this magazine.

R. W. B., JR., of Brooklyn, New York. Please write to me. Will not interfere with your plans, but must hear from you. Gloom.

HUTTO, GEORGE W.—He is forty-six years of age, an electrical worker, of fair complexion. He left home about twelve years ago, and may be around the Alabama River or De Bidder, Alabama. He is asked to write to his son, who will be glad to hear from any one who can give him news of his father. Irvin Hutto, Box 94, Columbia, Mississippi.

McELFISH, WILLIE.—Please write to your old pal George at his home address, 414 East Washington Street, Dothan, Alabama.

INFORMATION WANTED of **SAMUEL ELLIOTT**, who was adopted when he was about two months old in Chicago. This was about thirty-four years ago. His sister would be grateful for any news of him, if agreeable to his foster parents. N. E. E., care of this magazine.

CORNELIUS, WESLEY A.—He was a United States marine, stationed at the submarine base at San Pedro, California, from July, 1920, to August, 1921, and when last heard from was in Mexico. Any one knowing his whereabouts will do a favor by writing to his old buddy, Raymond Buffum, 48 Normal Boulevard, Lincoln, Nebraska.

F. G. B.—Please write to your wife who is very anxious to hear from you.

ANDREWS, ELLA MAY, who worked in Camp Funston during the war and was last heard of in Kansas City in 1919. Also **J. B. KLEIN**, who was a barber there. Information that will help to find either of these persons will be greatly appreciated by Mrs. B. B. Eggers, R. R. 1, Kahoka, Missouri.

WILLIAMS, or **MORAN, HARRY FRANKLIN**, who was last heard from in 1918 at a camp in Maryland. He is twenty-two years old, with blue eyes and light hair. His father will be very grateful for any information that will help him to find his son. M. C. Williams, Franklinton, North Carolina.

CHARTERS, DOCTOR WILLIAM.—The last letter received from him was mailed in Madras, India, January 31, 1911. He left Seattle on June 29, 1910, sailed from San Francisco, July 6th, arrived in Ceylon, August 20th, and from there went to Madras, where he entered a monastery. Any information will be appreciated by Doctor A. M. Brewer, 4704 Kenwood Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

DENSMORE, JOSEPH M.—He is a blacksmith and was last heard from in Saint Helens, Oregon, where he lived for some years. Two years ago he wrote saying that his eyes were troubling him, and he has not been heard from since. He is short, of dark complexion, with brown eyes. His sister will be most grateful to any one who can give her news of him. Mrs. Sarah Roberts, Box 221, East Main Street, Stratford, Connecticut.

PHIPPS, JOHN.—He was adopted by Mrs. Fulkerson, who lived in Texas, and later moved to La Junta, Colorado. His mother is very anxious to hear from him, or from any one who can give her news of him. Mrs. L. H. Freeman, 712 South Grand Street, Enid, Oklahoma.

SMITH.—I would like to hear from my brothers, **ARTHUR** and **DOUGLAS SMITH**, who left Toronto, Canada, about twenty-five years ago. John Alexander Smith, Box 582, Minot, North Dakota.

SANTMYER, ROY R.—Please come home to your mother or write to her. She is anxious to hear from you at once. Mrs. Mary Santmyer, 229 Shaffer Avenue, Washington, Pennsylvania.

T. J. W.—Please send your address to Steve O'Neill, care of this magazine.

ROBERTS, JESSE B.—He is an ex-marine and was last heard of in 1920, in Baltimore, Maryland. He is asked to write to his old pal, R. K., at the 1st Brigade, U. S. M. C. Field Hospital, Port au Prince, Haiti.

COVER, CLAUDE E.—He was last heard of in San Antonio, Texas, in 1916. Any one who knows his whereabouts will do a favor by writing to his son, L. C. Cover, care of this magazine.

LEAVEY, FRANK.—He was a real-estate salesman in West Hartford, Connecticut, in 1914. A friend would like to hear from him. Frank, care of this magazine.

LEGER, LAWRENCE.—Write to your brother, J. Walter Leger, U. S. S. "California," Box 21, care of Postmaster, San Francisco, California.

LOUDEN, ARTHUR.—He was last heard of in Dickenson, North Dakota, where he was brakeman on the railroad. He is about five feet seven inches tall, with blue eyes and brown hair. An old friend would like to hear from him, and will appreciate any information as to his whereabouts. Mrs. W. G. Henderson, care of this magazine.

THERAM, ALVAN H.—Please write to Sergeant James C. Whiteford, Schofield Barracks, Honolulu, H. T.

BARRETT, MRS. A.—She left her home seven years ago. She is about five feet in height, forty-eight years old, of dark complexion, and has a crippled finger on one hand. Her relatives are very anxious to get news of her and will be most grateful for any information that will help them to communicate with her. A. Barrett, 1305 Queen Street, Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada.

CHARLES.—Of course you know we shall always love just the same. We have no key to the auto-ped house. We both hope you are well and happy. Father and mother.

BROOKS, GEORGE.—He is twenty-six years old, rather tall, with dark hair. He is asked to write to his mother and let her know where he is. She will be glad to hear from any one who can give her information as to his whereabouts. Mrs. S. O., care of this magazine.

ROMINE, ROLAND.—He is twenty-three years old, with light hair and blue eyes. Information that will help to find him will be gratefully received by B. N., care of this magazine.

MORRIS, OSCAR JAMES.—Please write to your old buddy who was with you in Mexia, Texas. He has lost your address and wants to hear from you. George Buscher, care of this magazine.

MARSHALL.—I was taken from an orphanage two miles out of Anderson, Indiana, when I was six months old, by Mrs. James E. Smith, and I have never heard from any of my relatives. My real name is Leroy Marshall, and it is between twenty and twenty-two years ago that I was adopted. I hope that some one related to me will see this and write to me. I should be glad to hear from any one who can tell me about my people. Leroy Smith, care of this magazine.

BOWMAN, MACK.—He was last heard of in Arizona. His son, who has lost all trace of him, and has not seen him for four years, would be very thankful for any information that would help to find him. William H. Bowman, Route A, Box 361-B, Fresno, California.

WOODSEN, ELIZABETH.—She was last heard from in the spring of 1908, when she left Chicago for San Francisco. She was then about five feet seven inches tall, about thirty years old, of light complexion and blue eyes. She had two children in a boarding school in Chicago. Any information as to her whereabouts will be greatly appreciated by an old friend, who has news of importance for her. C. E. E., care of this magazine.

HANZEN, WILLY J., of Los Angeles, or any one who knows his address, will do a favor by writing to Walter Scott, 243 West Nineteenth Street, New York City.

CONLIN, BESSIE, who was also known as Beth Dixon, and was last heard of in Prosser, Washington, in 1912. Her brother is anxious to find her and will be grateful for any helpful information as to her whereabouts. Fred C. Conlin, care of this magazine.

LILLIAN.—Please write to me at once. I have many things to say to you and want to see you soon. Please pardon me and do not let anything keep you from writing to me. C. R. H., care of this magazine.

NESBITT, JACK, or McMAHON.—He was born in Brantford, Canada, about forty-five years ago, is five feet eight inches tall, has brown eyes, served in the Spanish-American War, Boer War, and World War. In the early part of the war he was stationed at Camp Borden, London, Ontario, Canada, was last seen in Cleveland, Ohio, in January, 1919, and was heard from in Panama in 1920. There are tattoo marks on both arms. Any one who can give give news of him will do a great favor by writing to J. Nelson, 14715 Saranac Road, Cleveland, Ohio.

CLARIDA, ROY H.—He was honorably discharged from the navy as ship's cook at San Diego, California, in May, 1922, and disappeared from that place in July of the same year. He served on the U. S. S. "Radford." An old shipmate would like to hear from him and will greatly appreciate any information. John Janiszewski, R. F. D. 3, Vernon, New York.

STRAFFIN, FRED D., or his wife, whose maiden name was Ethel Ford, and who lived in California since 1904, but has not been heard of for about five years. Her husband was living in St. Maries, Idaho, when last heard of. Information as to the whereabouts of these persons will be gratefully received by their daughter, Ethel G. Straffin, 1010 North Pennsylvania Street, Indianapolis, Indiana.

KAMPE, WILLIAM F., PHILIP G., and their sisters, **AMELIA GREEN** and **KATE MILLERSHIPE.** They were all living in Brooklyn, New York, about thirty years ago. Their brother George was put in the New York Juvenile Asylum in 1892, was sent West from there, and that is the last he has heard of his sisters and brothers. His brothers and the husband of Mrs. Amelia Green are all railroad men. Any news of them would be gladly received by Mr. and Mrs. George P. Kampe, care of this magazine.

N. L. R., or **DIZZY,** or **RAD,** please write to your old pal Morgan, care of this magazine.

GAINES, EARL FAY.—He was last heard of in La Junta, Colorado. His wife is heartbroken at his absence and will be most grateful to any one who can tell her where he is. Mrs. Frances Gaines, San Elizario, Texas.

MULLER, or **MILLER, FIDELI,** known to his friends as "Dutchy." He was last heard of sixteen years ago, when he was seventeen years old and was working with a freighting outfit at Tempe, Arizona. His home was at Big Bug, near Prescott. Information as to his whereabouts will be gladly received by his sister, Susie Muller, care of this magazine.

F. X. E.—We are very unhappy since you went away and cannot believe that you meant to leave us. Please write to me in care of this magazine, or at mother's. You need not come back, but do please write. John wants daddy. Anne.

GOODSON, HENRY.—He was born in Franklin County, Mississippi, on September 16, 1902. His mother is very anxious to hear from him and begs him to write to her without delay. Mrs. Annie Goodson, care of this magazine.

THOMPSON, JOHN.—He was last heard from in Seattle in the fall of 1920. He is twenty years old, with light-brown hair, blue eyes, and fair complexion. He was in the Washington Children's Home in Seattle in 1915, and later was in the navy. His sister is very anxious to hear from him and will gratefully appreciate any information. Mrs. Lena Nichols, 367 East Seventh Street, North, Portland, Oregon.

WILSON, TOM.—He is fifty-five years old, with blue eyes and dark-brown hair, was born in Canada, and was last heard of at Pine, Idaho, in July, 1914. He was always interested in gold mining. His brother would be grateful for any information concerning him. Melvin Wilson, Pe Ell, Washington.

SKEFFINGTON, BEATRICE E. and **CHARLES J.**—They lived on Russell Avenue, Detroit, Michigan. He is a machinist and worked at the Russell Wheel and Foundry, and at the American Blower Company. Any information that will help to find them will be gratefully received by B. D. Whitlock, Box 12058, Represa, California.

CREACY, ARTHUR who was last heard of in St. Louis, is asked to write to his half sister, Lela Shannon, Box 334, Cleveland, Oklahoma.

BOFFIN, R.—Please write to your wife at once. She has worried a great deal about you and is very ill. She has to go to the hospital for an operation. Your sister-in-law, Bert.

MATTHEW C.—I lost you in Georgia. Joined the army in 1922. Write me quick. Your pal, Private Rex Ramsey, Company E, 1st Infantry, San Antonio, Texas.

KING, FLOYD.—He was last heard of as being on the way to Oakland, California, from Columbus, Ohio. Information regarding his whereabouts will be gratefully received. P. C., care of this magazine.

SMITH, MRS. MAY.—She was last heard from in Richmond, California, in September, 1920. Her sons would like to hear from her, or from any one who knows where she is now, and will gratefully appreciate any information. L. W Smith care of this magazine.

MARCHER, E. P.—Please send your address to Ethel Marcher, care of this magazine. Letters sent to you have been returned.

CAIN, LOUIS.—He was in the State of Delaware when last heard of about thirteen years ago. His aunt Nettie would like to hear from him, as she has very good news and quite a surprise for him. His brothers also hope he will write soon. Information that will help to communicate with him will be gladly received by Mrs. Nettie Ridgeway, care of this magazine.

SIMON, JOHN X.—Have been searching for you everywhere and am awfully worried. Everything is O. K. Please write to me in care of this magazine. John Hamilton.

RULE, ART.—He was last seen at Dodge City, Kansas, in 1918. He was thirty-five years of age, five feet eight inches tall, with brown hair and eyes, and wore glasses. There is important news awaiting him and he is asked to write at once to J. O. Rule, General Delivery, Sparks, Nevada, who will be glad to hear from any one who can give information as to his whereabouts.

CLARK, FLORENCE ELLEN.—She was last heard from in Wheatland, Wyoming, where she was employed on a ranch about 1910. Any information that would help to find her would be gladly received by her friend, Mrs. Jessie Cowan, 19 West Thirteenth Street, Sioux City, Iowa.

O'TOOLE, GEORGE ELDON.—He is sixteen years old, was born in Toronto, Canada, and has been missing from his home since June 6, 1922. He is five feet two inches in height, with brown hair and large blue eyes, his right hand is slightly smaller than the left, and there is a small cut under the left eye. Any information that will help to know where he is will be gratefully received by his anxious mother, who thinks he may be with a show, or working on a farm. Mrs. I. O'Toole, care of this magazine.

SKINNER, ROSCOE, his son **ELVIS,** and his daughter **EFFIE.**—They were last heard of in the State of Illinois about six years ago. The son was known to be in Camp Grant, Illinois, in 1921. Information that will help to find these people will be gratefully received by Everett Lester Skinner, 720 West Ransom Street, Kalamazoo, Michigan.

DUNN, GEORGE WILLIAM.—His sister has not heard from him in nine years. The last address she had was 345 Cosby Road, Philadelphia. He is her only brother and it would make her very happy to get news of him. It is hoped that he will see this and write. Any one who has known him, or who can give information about him will do a great favor by writing to Mrs. A. Stone, care of this magazine.

ANDERSON, ANDREW.—He came to the United States from Sweden thirty years ago and made his home in the Eastern States for many years. Later he went West, and about twelve years ago went to Sweden to see his parents. He returned to the United States and has never been heard from since. His sister Bessie would be very happy to get news of him and would be glad to hear from any one who can tell her what has become of him, and whether he is dead or alive. Mrs. Andrew Bracken, Paul, Idaho.

ROPER, ELDER F.—He is five feet eight inches tall, with brown eyes, black hair, and a ruddy complexion. A friend, who has valuable papers of his, including his army discharge papers, would be grateful for any information as to his present address. W. H. H., care of this magazine.

SNYDER, MRS. RALPH O., who was last heard from in Caddo County, Oklahoma, ten years ago. Her father is anxious to hear from her, and hopes she will see this notice and write to him without delay. George O. Hayes, care of this magazine.

CARRIE, an English girl, blonde, whose last address was in Coblenz, Germany, is asked to write to a friend who has papers and letters that belong to her, and would like to know where to send them. Walker, P. O. Box 23, Red Bank, New Jersey.

GEORGE, FRANK.—Information as to his present address will be greatly appreciated and will eventually lead to a meeting with his daughter, Anna Marie George. Please write to A. R. A., care of this magazine.

GOODWIN, DORA.—She was adopted from a home when she was four years old, in 1912. She had dark hair and brown eyes. Her mother and aunts will greatly appreciate any information as to her whereabouts. K. T., care of this magazine.

WELLS, TED.—When last heard of he was on a sheep ranch in Tennessee. His old friend Ralph, who used to live in Laporte, Indiana, would be glad to hear from him, or from any one who knows his address. Ralph Zimmerman, Concordia College, Oak Park, Illinois.

SHELBOURN, JOHN J.—He is about forty-three years old, five feet four inches in height, and has light hair. He was last heard from in the cotton mills at Lowell, Massachusetts. His mother died four years ago and his sisters and brother are very anxious to hear from him. Any information that will help them to know where he is will be gladly received by his sister Maud, care of this magazine.

LARSON, PETER.—When last heard of, about thirty-eight years ago, he was a sailor and received his mail in New York. He was born in Denmark. Since he was last heard from his parents and his brother Matthew have died. His other brothers and his sister Christina are still living and all would be very happy to get news of their brother. Any one who has seen him, or who can give any news of him whatever, will do a great favor by writing to his brother John Larson, R. F. D. 5, Box 76, Prophetstown, Illinois.

GORDON, JAMES CARROLL.—He is twenty-five years old, about five feet nine inches tall, of fair complexion, with brown curly hair and wears glasses. He was last heard of in San Francisco in 1920. His sister would be most grateful for any information that would help her to communicate with him. Mrs. J. M. Michael, 639 South Angus Street, Fresno, California.

KNIGHT, MRS. JESSE.—Her last known address was in Marytown, West Virginia, but letters sent to her there have been returned. Her brother Steve would like to hear from her, and will greatly appreciate any helpful information as to her present address. S. E. Haught, 4105 North Twenty-seventh Street, Omaha, Nebraska.

CONNOLLY, JAMES.—He was in Ewen, Michigan, in 1893, employed in a saw mill, and the last news received of him was that he had married and settled in Warren, Arkansas. An old friend would like to hear from him. G. P., care of this magazine.

MASON, JACK, or his son, whose name is believed to be **JOE.** Jack at one time lived in Marshalltown, Iowa, and was well known in the show business. In 1917 he went to France and was wounded in action, but it is not known if he came back to the States or not. If the son should write he is asked to give date and place of his birth, and his full name. S. B. W., care of this magazine.

AKOM, ROBERT RAY.—He left Fort Wayne, Indiana, on March 9th last, and no trace of him has been found so far. He is nearly five feet six inches tall, with brown hair and eyes. He has always been a teamster and worked around horses. His wife and mother are very anxious about him and will be most grateful for any information that will help them to know where he is. Mrs. R. R. Akom, 603 Knitters Avenue, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

DRAPER, WILLIAM, formerly a resident of Morrow and Muskingum counties, Ohio, who has a sister named Viola McQuigg in Morrow County. He is over forty years of age, has lost one leg, and is interested in machinery. He was last heard from in the vicinity of Great Falls, Montana, operating a farm tractor on a ranch. There is valuable information awaiting him, and he is asked to write to J. A. Shearer, 8 East Broad Street, Columbus, Ohio.

KENETSON, LOUISE, and her sister, whose last known address was Calgary, Alberta, Canada, and other friends from Winnipeg, are asked to write to G. H. W., care of this magazine.

SANDERS, BENNIE.—He was last heard from in August, 1915, at San Francisco, after his discharge from the navy. He is asked to write to Harry M. Heller, care of this magazine, who will be glad to hear from him no matter where he may be.

REESE, IDA, who was married to George M. Ramsey until 1910, and has since remarried. She was last heard of in Chicago in that year, when her sister, Emma Hahn, died. There is important information awaiting her, and any one who knows her address will do a favor by writing to L. A. Frieling, 3019 North Providence Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

BROWN, L. W., from Knoxville, Tennessee, and last heard of in Moorehead, Minnesota, is asked to write to Henry A. Brown, 128 Golden Avenue, Long Beach, California.

PRATT.—My grandfather's name was George Pratt, and my mother's name was Martha May. I do not know any of my mother's people, and would be very happy if some of my uncles and aunts would write to me. Ella Buck, Box 57, Toppenish, Washington.

WOMACK, WILL.—He was last heard of at Monument, Oregon, thirteen years ago. He is about forty-five years of age. An old friend would be very happy to hear from him or from any one who knows his address. A. O. T., care of this magazine.

HINKLE, FRANK, who was in Chicago, Illinois, when last heard of. His son would like very much to hear from him, or from any one who knows where he is. Private Albert F. Hinkle, 82d F. A., Battery C, Fort Bliss, Texas.

JOHNSON, ALMA.—When last heard of she was at Bethany Home, Minneapolis, Minnesota, in 1891. She has married since then, and it was heard that she had several daughters and had moved to Texas. Also that she had gone to the home in 1904 to inquire about me. I was known there as Hortance Johnson. Any information that would help me to find my mother would be greatly appreciated. Mrs. H. B. Stormo, Garretson, South Dakota.

MARTIN, ERNEST, DUDLEY, PURVIS, and **LENA,** are asked to write to their sister, who is very anxious to hear from them. Ethel Martin, Box 153, Vicksburg, Mississippi.

SHIRLEY, R. V.—Please come home. We all want to see you. Everything is all right. Your wife, Mrs. R. V. Shirley.

CURREN, HOWARD, known as "Panama" Curren, who soldiered with me in Fort Riley, Kansas, in 1920. I would be glad to hear from him, or from any one who knows his address. Jack Heminger, Box 914, Claflin, Kansas.

KERNS, ANNA LEE.—She is about twenty-two years of age and was last heard from at Washington, D. C., about two years ago. She is asked to write to an old friend, who will be glad to hear from any one who knows her address. H. L. Handsell, care of this magazine.

HUDGINS.—I would like to find some of my mother's people. Her name was Eveline Hudgins. She was the daughter of Jack Hudgins, and her mother's maiden name was Wright. My mother married a man named Neal Blackstock. Information that will help me to find any of her relatives will be gratefully received. Mrs. W. D. King, care of this magazine.

KOSAMOSSKI, D.—He is a native of Hilo, Hawaii, and was last heard of in Oakland, California, in 1919. Any one who knows his address will do a great favor by writing to Martinez Kosamosski 2922 Baker Street, Baker, Oregon.

SULLIVAN, MISS JEAN, who was employed at the Murray Hill Hotel, Sault Ste Marie, Michigan, in 1917, and at the Newberry Hotel in Chicago, in 1918, is asked to write to H. E. Boland, F. O. E. 297, Columbus, Ohio.

RUSSELL, WALTER GUY.—He was last heard from at Camp Meade, Maryland, in 1920, when he was discharged. He has the left heel shot away and walks with a decided limp. He is thirty-seven years old and has red hair. His brother has not seen him since 1905, when his mother died, and would be very happy to get news of him. Any information that will help to find him will be gladly received and appreciated. Harry M. Russell, care of this magazine.

CORDES, AUGUST.—He came to the United States from Germany about 1875. He had married in Hamburg, and his wife's name was Louisa. His brother Carl, with his wife and two sons, Ludolph and Carl, Jr., came to this country ten years before, and lived at Odin, Illinois. When last heard of, about 1907, August owned a ranch and dealt in thoroughbred stock. If he is living he would be about eighty-six years old. Any information about him, and as to where he was located, will be greatly appreciated by his niece, Mary Howell, 1617 Edgar Avenue, Mattoon, Illinois.

KEITH, ROY, BEATRICE, LILLIAN, and **CLAUDE,** are asked to write to their brother as soon as possible. Hollis E. Keith, R. R. 8, Urbana, Ohio.

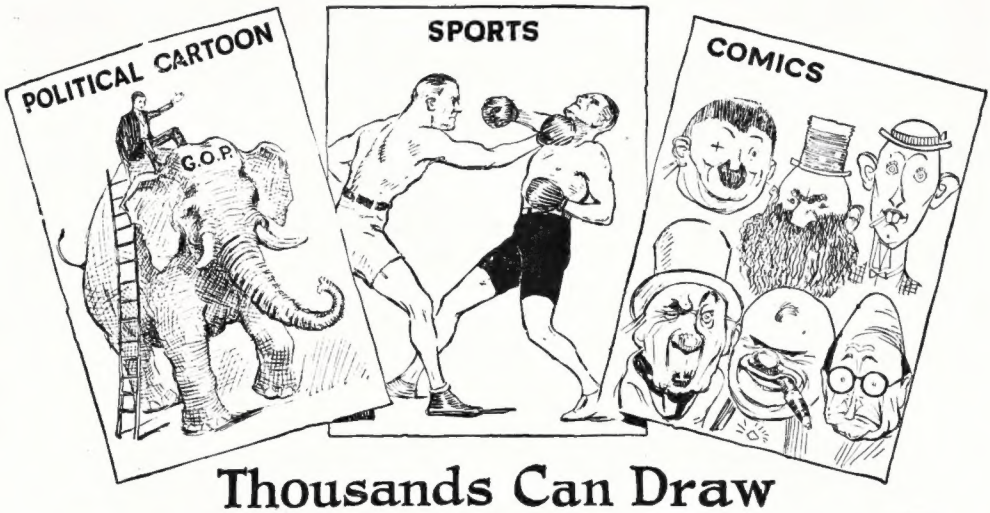
HULSEY, JOHN and **WILLIAM,** grandfather and uncle. John was last heard from about thirty-five years ago in Alabama, and William was last heard of at Pride Station, Tennessee, in 1887. Would also be glad to hear from any one by the name of Hulsey. Bill Hulsey, Pilot Point, Texas.

DAVIS, W. L.—He left his home in Melville, Louisiana, in 1909, to look for work, and has not been heard from since. He was five feet nine inches tall, with black hair and eyes, and would be now fifty-seven years of age. His wife is anxious to learn what has become of him, and will greatly appreciate any helpful information. Mrs. C. L. Davis, 512 Seventh Street, Monroe, Louisiana.

REED, CLAUDE, known as Jack, and last heard of in San Francisco. His mother is very anxious about him and will be grateful for any information that will help her to know where he is. Please write to his brother, Chester Reed, 425 South Twenty-fifth Street, Herrin, Illinois.

McPARTLAND, JOHN.—He sometimes uses his mother's name of Harvey. He left New York City about 1909, and was last heard of in Oklahoma. He usually worked on railroads, and is known to have worked on the tracks of the "Big Four." His brother would be glad to hear from him and will thankfully appreciate any information that will help to find him. Sergeant Frank McPartland, Company I, 5th U. S. Infantry, Fort Williams, Maine.

WOODSON, ALFRED.—He was last heard from in February, 1917, in Cleveland, Ohio. He had been in the hospital with his left foot frozen. It is thought that a doctor sent him to a place in Victoria, Canada. He was twenty-one years of age, about five feet six inches tall, with brown hair and eyes, and tattoo marks on his arm. His mother is anxious to hear from him, and will be most grateful for any information. Mrs. Georgia Woodson, 205 Eighteenth Street, Lynchburg, Virginia.



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